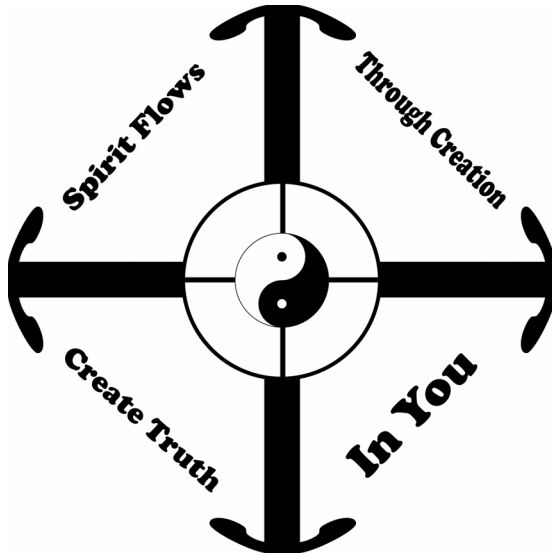


Dharma Seeds...

*Extraordinary transformation
within a small seed...*



*arose a miracle...
from the depths of Folsom Prison*

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First Edition 2009

This book is dedicated to all those behind prison bars. There is a way out of the hell you are in.

I also am indebted to many who helped me along the way in my own spiritual transformation. First, Fr. Thomas Keating, Thich Nhat Hanh, my family, Michael G, Fred and Kent at the E.F., Michael K., Diago, Paul, Frenchie, Skinny Puppy, Johnathan, and to Paul O. I want to also thank Siddha Yoga, Oakland Ashram Prison Project Volunteers and to the Quakers with their Alternative to Violence volunteers.

Most importantly thanks goes to God, who showed me He loved me when I thought no one else would. He also led me out of my hell. And He has given me a new life full of abundance.

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Introduction

Reprinted from *Radical Grace* newsletter 1998

What a joy to read the article “Meditation in Folsom” in the August/September issue of *Radical Grace*. I too was in Folsom Prison, a convicted felon serving a six-year sentence. More importantly, I was a member-from its inception until my release in the fall of 1997-of the Contemplative Fellowship group featured in that article. My success on parole and in my personal life can be totally attributed to the meditation and disciplines I learned in this group.

The human psyche is naturally broken down with the repressive environment of prison walls. Low self-esteem, negative peer pressure, and little or no family contact all demoralize a person’s spirit. One begins to feel abandoned by God and that there is no redemptive hope for the soul. My inner journey began with some Buddhist teachings that inspired in me a desire to somehow get right with God. Eventually a community volunteer introduced a small group of us to centering prayer meditation as taught in Open Mind, Open Heart, by Fr. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian monk who truly “walks the talk.” I read the book and cried. Keating calls it “*Prayer of the Heart*” because it reaches to the deepest core of our being.

All I know is that the daily meditation practice prescribed by Keating transformed my life. Joy and happiness, the desire to live right and to fellowship moment by moment with God – these began to infiltrate the fabric of my being. I saw gradual changes in my thinking, direction, and goals as they became more godly and spiritually oriented. Never before had these elements of character been present in my life.

The same thing was happening to the other men in our fellowship, all convicted felons, all of us growing together. We were prisoners learning how to be free on the inside, looking forward to our Friday night group meetings. By the time I was paroled, we had more than sixty members; now the group has over 150 members and is growing every day. [2009 reflects over 3000 prisoners meditating within over eight prisons]

I still laugh when I recall the prison guards shaking their heads after peering in and seeing over forty to sixty men sitting silently in a circle around a small lit candle. In a place overrun with prejudice and mistrust, we were an extraordinary mixture of Blacks, Whites, Mexicans, Buddhists, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics and Jews and more. As we quieted our minds and began to rest in God’s love, all ethnic and religious barriers broke down. A non-violent ethic began to permeate our fellowship. We became brothers and recognized our need to support each other in our journey together. Just crossing paths in the cellblocks or out in the yard was a blessing.

But it hasn't been easy. We have all had to take a hard look at the rancid fruit produced by our past actions including the pain and trauma we've caused our victims, their families, friends, and communities, not to mention our own families. But merely seeing the ugliness – even hating it and desperately wanting to change – is not enough to accomplish real change. The wounds are too deep. That's exactly why centering prayer works; it digs down to the deepest recesses of our being – the unconscious – the place where real healing occurs. Keating calls it Divine Therapy.

I've been out of prison for almost a year now, having returned to Oklahoma City where I hold a responsible job and well respected in the community. People who knew me before are in awe of the changes I have made, and continually comment on the joy and love they see in my actions. I am living proof of the transformation that is possible when volunteers bring contemplative meditation into prisons. I know the power of this ministry; so does my family, my parole officer, and my employer. My father said to me, "Mark, whatever you are doing, don't ever stop." My parole officer said, "Mark, I know you will never return to prison – you are one of the few who will beat the odds." And I believe she is right. Because as long as I continue to nourish my soul every day, prayerfully quieting my mind and communing with my God, the desire to disrespect myself or anyone else is gone.

If I were to talk to my brothers in Folsom Prison right now I would say this: Before hitting the streets, have your daily mediation practice securely in place. Readjusting to society after years in prison is hard enough, but losing your spiritual support system may weaken your daily practice. If you can't find a weekly fellowship to join, begin one yourself – you only need two or three to get started. Your daily mediation will be more important than ever when you are released; it will ease the stress and give you strength to stand up to all you'll have to face. Remember, communing with God each and every day is our freedom. It doesn't matter where you are. This is the freedom we have all longed for.

And to my brothers serving life sentences, the "lifers" in Contemplative Fellowship, I say thank you for reaching out to me and to so many others. You are clearly the cornerstone of our fellowship. You're continually in my prayers. Namaste.

Finally, to our society at large I want to say, I know we do not deserve your forgiveness, but please don't give up on us. You are going to see Contemplative Fellowship groups like ours in more and more prisons. As this occurs, more and more convicts will be leaving those prisons armed not with guns and knives or hatred and bitterness, but instead with a new, non-violent way of thinking and a daily meditation practice. For these parolees, returning to prison will not be the norm but the rare exception. Please support these prison ministries and the men and women who come out of them. Had

it not been for Contemplative Fellowship at Folsom, I would not be where I am today. God gave me a second chance, and my daily spiritual disciplines have taught me the meaning of true freedom.

Mark D. Maxey

Chapter 1

Echoing off the granite floors and walls was the loudest clanking sound I had ever heard. It startled my soul down to the very core. I cringed as I took a gaze around to see about thirty other people inside a holding cell in prison. “How did I ever get myself into this situation,” I pondered quietly to my self. It was like a very surreal dream, which I knew I would not wake from until at least two years and ten months later. That was May 23, 1995 when I was unloaded off the blue prison bus at Folsom State Prison in Represa, CA. All my self worth and dignity hung at my feet along with heavy metal chains attached to ankle handcuffs, which wrapped around my waist and chained to another set of handcuffs for my hands. My head spun as if I was on a bad drug trip. I thought back to my adolescence when I had studied magic tricks on our farm in Broken Arrow, OK. I knew no sleight of hand or trick could help me escape what was now facing me.

Several of the other convicts waiting inside the grey dingy paint peeling walls of the holding cell at the notorious Folsom State Prison, I recognized. Several had been in the news lately. One had kidnapped an elderly lady and had stuffed her inside the trunk of his car in which he held her for several days. Another young guy had gunned down a rival gang member, only to have the bullets hit a group of teenagers. There was a buzz going around in the holding tank with some of the African American men who said the famous Rick James was housed here at Folsom. Rick James was a rock and roll icon that had gotten very strung out on drugs and ended up at Folsom. Others talked about another guy who recently was featured on one of those weekly television movies of the week shows. He had kidnapped various college girls and held them captive in a small wooden box, handcuffed and buried about three feet underground. I remember watching that movie and saying that is one person I would not ever want to meet. Yet my actions had created the very nightmare of placing me inside a place where I could come face to face with such a person. To be honest, I looked like an Abbott and Costello movie; I was so out of place from the looks of the other men. But deep down, I knew there was one thing we all shared in common which allowed me to see their humanness. I, myself along with these other men, had

acted in ways that made us lose our freedom. For the most part, we had created our own unreality by choosing to do things we should have known better than to have done.

Now my world was smaller, confined, restricted and my life depended upon whether or not I could navigate myself around this mysterious world of life behind bars. “Who was my cell-mate going to be?” “When would we eat?” “How would I ever survive in the very place I never intended to be?” These questions were bouncing off my inner mind about one hundred miles an hour.

Surrounding me were grown men in green or tan uniforms, all moving around barking orders to the inmate workers. They were loud, rude, and some what demeaning. But whom could I blame for being put in such a place? This was my karma. One by one they called our names, took our photos, gave us each an identification card and moved into another holding area. Some one in our small group began to sing the famously known country song by Johnny Cash, Folsom Prison Blues. “I’m stuck in Folsom Prison and time keeps dragging by.” How true those words would become for me during the next two years and ten months.

It was then that a loud bell began to rattle and reverberate off the granite walls, followed by the sound of a metal rod engaging against rusted, old metal tracks. “CHOW” was heard from a correctional officer and inmates came out of their cells walking right past us. “MMMM fish,” one of the men said, other comments were heard like yelling obscenities and sexual remarks towards those of us in the holding area. It was like a cattle call. I was hungry and could feel my stomach growl, but it did not matter, my mind was soaking in the experience playing out right in front of me. Some of the men cackled as they said, “They won’t last a week till they are someone’s bitch or shanked. Taken out in a pine box.” This made several men walking by laugh. Quietly to myself I said a prayer to God, or anyone listening to help me make through the night. If I do just that, morning might bring a better understanding of the situation. Right then, someone touched my shoulder and I about jumped out of my skin, those in the holding cell just rolled in laughter. “You gonna make it

little man?" a guy asked. I just nodded and looked through the bars holding back tears from falling down my cheek.

It was about then that an officer came and told us to line up. It was just the beginning of many lines I was to follow behind for two years and ten months. In our lovely putrid yellow orange jumpsuits we marched down the grey floor with a red line for us to follow to the dining hall. Once inside, it was unreal. No time to look around, but I was just too nervous to eat. Yet I found my hand shoveling food down, for we were told we had exactly five minutes to eat and that was it. The dining hall in Folsom is in a caged chain link fence surrounding metal tables with four seats. All concrete floors with hard exposed granite walls that were built by inmates some time around 1880. Above us were two officers behind chicken wire on a metal and wood catwalk marching back and forth with rifles slung around their shoulders like an old western movie. Everywhere we walked or went there usually were guards with rifles sneering down at us. An older lifer saw me looking, and said, "You better hide down below the table if that gun is fired. It just keeps bouncing while you pray it does not hit you." Another lifer said, "Watch out for anything on your plate covered in gravy, normally the meat is rancid and you will die if you eat it." Everyone within earshot laughed. It was a kind of laughter that left you wondering. If what was said was true and they were just agreeing or if it was a just a joke to strike fear in you? Either way, I did not eat anything for a while that was covered in gravy.

After chow, if that is what you can call it, we were marched back down to Building Three for what is called Fish Row. Fish is a moniker given any freshly arrived inmate. You are marched and told to stand in front of a cell, two men to each cell. I counted thirty-three cells, five tiers; all with thirty-three cells, behind them is another set of five tiers with thirty-three cells. All grey, dingy, paint chipping and black iron bars running from the floor to the ceiling of the tier above you. Concrete floors, solid granite walls with hardly more than eight windows per side. All were caked yellow with years of soil and soot that prevented you seeing outside. Only visible area was your own six by ten-foot concrete cell and the granite wall in front of you. Once settled, everyone began yelling out the names of their friends,

counties, asking for a shot of coffee or cigarettes. This meshed into a steady stream of loud white noise that was deafening. The tiers were then filled with runner's running back and forth taking newly arrived fish, any thing and everything.

After what seemed to be hours, the lights were turned off. We were told turn in for the night. I lay upon my bunk wondering what tomorrow would bring me. Pondering what decisions I had made that brought me to this hell. Wondering if I would be psychologically scarred from this experience. I just lay on my bunk with a paper-thin mattress with no pillow, looking at the moonlight outside from the cracked windows, realizing that outside is a world so different than the one I had brought myself into. Tomorrow would be the first day of prison life for me. Tomorrow would be another day on this journey that I have reluctantly but yet have to endure. I cried myself silently to sleep, knowing that I had finally reached the bottom. I had no one to blame but myself. I knew I had to find a way to crawl back up. But I was too tired and too overwhelmed to deal with that now. For now, I would sleep behind walls with a man holding a rifle walking outside my tier. In the shadows I see a rat running along the granite wall. I laughed; even that little creature was in prison.

Chapter Two

In the spring of 1994 I found myself sitting inside Sacramento County Jail. Throughout Sacramento County Jail, each floor had three modular units called pods. All with two tiers of twenty something cells each encased with solid metal doors and a tiny slit for a window. Inside my pod were some of the most infamous suspects at that time. Eric Royce “The Thrill Killer” Leonard who had gone on repeated Tuesday night random killings was in the cell next to me. Across the way, was Richard Campos, the Fire Bomber, who had thrown several malatov cocktails into synagogues, city council member’s houses, and other ethnic groups’ buildings or homes. Also there was Loi Khac Nguyen, the Asian young man, dubbed the Good Guys Killer. Another recent addition was a red longhaired young man, who was accused of racial hate crimes. I was in a pod full of Krips, Bloods, White Supremist and high profile cases. How did a country boy from Broken Arrow, OK end up here?

About two weeks of being in jail and talking to my public defender, I knew I was not going to walk away from this. Nor would I be able to make bail. I finally broke down and called my sister, who was a lawyer in Oklahoma. When she received a collect call from the Sacramento County Jail, she in her own special way, knew something was wrong. She broke down in tears. I being in denial, at that time kept trying to speak above her. Telling her all this was going to be easy to walk away from. I thought I could bull shit my way out of yet another episode of me making monumental mistakes and walking away. I thought I was like Teflon...nothing would stick. However, all my sister could say through her tears were, “Maybe now you will get the help you truly need.” I did not need help. I was fine. Except deep down I knew I did. I was in jail, with no way out. I was facing several charges of lewd and lascivious charges that would not simply disappear. I was too much emotional at the time to see just how low I had finally become. I was not yet ready to look into the mirror and face the demons and ugliness I knew I had become. Yet I needed my family now more than ever. Deep inside I did not know what my family would do. I had failed again, with a long track record of failures behind me. And yet I was thousands of miles away.

This distance from my family allowed me to begin a long journey of healing which eventually brought me out of fear and hell into a life of joyful abundance. Simply I was too afraid to look within. Thus I began my journey in that spring of 1994, which led me to Folsom and finally back to Oklahoma. But right now I was in hell and I wanted nothing more than to escape the situation facing me.

One of the first things I learned in jail that you had many hours to do nothing. When we were allowed out for recreation, though that term is laughable, you could walk around a room a bit bigger than a normal dining room and den combined. We had tables to play cards on, or dominoes or we could watch television.

I was thrown into a mix of cultures and persons from all sorts of backgrounds. I had mistakenly thought I was better than most. I had come from a somewhat privileged middle class family and my mannerisms reflected that. This was not good as it caused quite a hurdle for me to overcome. Looking back at this today, I laugh. I was so blind to my actions or how I projected myself to others. However, at that time in my life I was simply lost in so many ways. Having to learn to live somewhat peacefully in a broad diverse cross section of persons along with the nightly news exposing what some of the guys were in for. I had to learn quickly how to get along, not to judge others, and accept them as they were. I was not as good at that in the spring of 1994 as I am now. But this was the beginning of my journey.

It was also a learning experience in that the actions of the inmates were not as grossly inhuman as those exhibited by many of the guards. I remember once I saw a young black man being escorted from his cell. Removed to a room we used for religious programs. And from my window perspective on my tier I could tell that the guard was physically hitting and kicking this inmate. All the while the other officers looked on and did nothing. He was brought back to his cell all bloodied. He was not allowed to get medical attention. Later that night, I had a visit with my public defender and told him about this. I knew it

was a potential civil liberties case. I wanted to expose the malicious and wanton actions of corrupt officers. He basically said, "Look, you need to focus on your case. These types of incidents happen frequently here, so if you want to speak up you will be singled out like that young man. No one can help you then. Not me, nor your family. For all the officers have to say, is that you were threatening them and resisting orders." Right then I knew I was not in any place I had ever been before. I had no experiences to equipoise all this new stimuli I was experiencing daily. In my mind, the actions of the officers were no different than the ones reportedly committed by the other inmates. The reality was that it all happened behind closed doors and walls. Who would accept the word of a criminal?

Another time an African American officer dragged the longhaired white supremacist down the second tier stairs by his hair. His head and arms and body were just being pulled down the stairs like a rag doll. I remember my cellmate at this time said, "Man, you see what you get when you do racist things, and end up in jail, they take it out on you." We talked a bit on how wrong the actions of the officers were, but also the actions of that young man had created his own reality. This would not be the last time I witnessed such atrocities. This also began a path for me to look deeper within, reflecting upon how my actions linked to the present reality of my life. I also realized many unseen crimes were committed in jail and prison by inmates and guards alike. The sad reality is that most of society does not care about humane treatment of persons in prisons or jails. This dichotomy hit me very hard. No longer would the world I live in be the same. I knew I was going to be changed. I didn't know if that change would be for the better or the worse.

I also began to see the humanity behind the inmate's persona. I played cards with them. Walked around the perimeters of our pod for exercise with them. Ate with them and watched television with them. They were individuals. While I knew about the crimes they were charged with, I was brought face to face with the fact they were also human beings. During my time outside, previous to being incarcerated, I never thought of criminals on a personal level. In my way of unmindful thinking, I assumed they were bad persons beyond

redemption. Never giving them a second thought. Now that I was living with them on a daily basis, I did have to give them a second thought. Even I was a criminal. Even the weirdest of all criminals, the killers, the mass murderers, were men who laughed, joked and treated me for the most part humanely. While I am neither excusing them of their actions that placed them there. Nor am I saying that the rights and feelings of their victims are not valid. I am saying they are human. I was beginning to see past the facade of their projected self and seeing them in a larger sense of understanding them as a human being. Upon getting to know several of the men, and listening to their life stories, I saw hurt, rejected and abused persons. They never received the healing or protection they needed as children. That type of hurt and lack of healing led them to become the criminals they were now. If someone had been there for them, to protect them, I had to ask myself, would they ever have become a criminal? This dichotomy I wrestled with for many a night inside that jail. Little did I know that this form of contemplation of suffering would lead to my own heart softening and to my ultimate healing.

Chapter Three

While in Sacramento County Jail, my family sent me many books to occupy my more than ample free time. Also a dear friend, Michael G., a few months before I was arrested began to teach me the practice of meditation. I now had the time to sit. I remember he sent me a book while in jail. I had begun to read it with him prior to me being in jail. A Buddhist writer named Ashvagosha, around the third century, wrote the book “Awakening of Faith”. He had also given me many of the Carlos Castaneda books about Don Juan, which we read together. We would then discuss them outside upon his porch in Sacramento until the wee hours of the morning. Prior to my arrest, I was living in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains upon ancient sacred land owned by a Christian Esoteric community. I was living much like modern day monastics. The books and reading my friend Michael G. had shared with me became very useful to me while sitting inside jail. I can’t think but that this was just happenstance of our crossing paths. He was really a mystic who helped me transform myself. I learned a lot through our dialogues while I was in jail. I owe a lot of dept to this man and to his friend Kent, along with Fred who allowed me to stay with upon that magic mountain in the Sierra Foothills.

Living on that secluded mountaintop prior to my incarceration in Sacramento County Jail, really in a way prepared me for living inside jail and ultimately prison. Michael G. used to remind me that the shading of the drama in front of me (jail cell) is no different than if I were outside. I had to deal with my own shit, transmute it, process it, contemplate it, and gain wisdom from it. Now I had more time than many others (in the free world) so why not take the opportunity to learn. Michael G. made me see that instead of looking at incarceration as a bad thing, I could view it as a positive. How I lived with my experience was up to me. I could either make it worthwhile, or I could fret it away. I could learn to see the mystical present moment or just stay the same. While I was not yet ready to admit my actions had placed me behind bars, I was beginning to see this as an opportunity the universe was giving me.

My family paid for subscriptions to magazines such as Shambala Sun, and I wrote away for other Buddhist and Christian literature. One book that stands out very much to me is one that was sent in by the L. Ron Hubbard group, Criminon. It was called “The Way to Happiness”. Basically it taught simple character and moral conduct. It was like a light bulb went off inside my head while I was reading this booklet. I had begun to see how so much of my life before jail was filled with immoral and unloving actions or thoughts. So much of my previous life was mirrored by how I thought my father was. I came from a family that was somewhat privileged on the political side of things. Most of my life I had been shown to be someone other than what you projected out to others. And if you did not do anything too bad, one could use special favors from those in power to get out of almost anything. I was so good at analyzing anything and convincingly debating my way out of any infraction. I had lost my self-identity. Not just me, but my real SELF, my soul. I did not see black and white; everything was gray. It could be debated either way for one’s advantage. So basic common humane character traits or morals were not something I was conscious that I had. There was no need for that, for I was like Teflon. Power can be corrupting at times. As the saying goes, Absolute power corrupts absolutely. So this free book taught me ways to build a spiritual and moral foundation for myself.

From the books I was reading I began to come alive inwardly. It was like a small fire growing inside my soul as I become aware of these ancient spiritual truths. I saw past the fabric of religions and begin to see the deeper hidden true meanings in what spiritual writers were saying. I wanted the truth, not religion. Not someone else’s interpretation but my own full understanding of the spiritual truth. Many of the bible thumpers were only expressing their lack of knowledge, but what came forth was they thought I was dealing with the devil with my studies of meditation and other spiritual paths. In actuality I was finding common threads of the same messages being said from many religions. So obviously this universal truth had to be important. In Psalms 46:10 it states, “Be still, and know that I am God”. Psalms 119:15 says, “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways”. But one verse that stood out the most was Proverbs 8:7 “My mouth shall meditate truth, and my lips shall hate wickedness”. So meditation was in the Bible.

As this verse stood out the most to me. I began to see how my mind and mouth (what I chose to speak about) were not good things but was rather unloving. I begun to read about and practice meditation. I was contemplating these new character building truths and moral values. I was getting mail from Orthodox Catholic, Roman Catholic, Zen, Buddhism, Bhai' and other free newsletters with spiritual writings. I didn't care where it came from, so long as it made sense. My mind and heart begun to soften and I was gaining the ability to hold a mirror to my soul and see what was hidden. I was facing my demons I had hidden long ago.

One book, which pushed me over the edge on accepting my faults, was Chogram Trumpa's "Meditation in Action." This book really made sense to me; it was if it was written for just what I was going through at that time. In the book it talks about healing, and reaching deep within and dealing with the ugliness that prevents one from having a wide-open space for true spirituality. I was finally ready to look within my soul.

I was celled at this time in a single cell. I chose to lock myself in so to speak. I did not eat, nor socialize or go out into the day room in the pod for recreation for three days. I stayed in my cell. I used this time to review all the facts of my hurts, disappointments, let downs, and pain. I went back to my earliest recollection. I reached deep into the cobwebs of my mind. From four years of age and up till my present age of thirty-two.

I was learning how these past hurts and pain and allowing them to stay in our memory keep us from experiencing true freedom in our spiritual development. By hanging on to these memories and allowing them to fester, become like a cancer growing upon our soul. It gives us reason to be angry. It gives us the reason to treat others unloving. It gives us permission allow our speech to become mean and nasty. The pain we never allowed to heal, becomes the dysfunction that permits our actions to be harmful for others. Until one is able to heal those memories, they keep us in a cycle of fear, hurt and hell. Some of our

actions are unconscious to us. Other times it has become so familiar to us that we are truly blind to seeing our actions inflict more pain onto others. To finally begin ridding our selves of these memories and the attachment they hold within our mind and heart, will eventually give more space for true divine spiritual love.

When I emerged from my three days of gut wrenching replaying of those memories I had been holding onto I felt refreshed. I felt the water falling down upon me in the shower as if all my pains and hurts were also being washed clean. Those three days were full of emotional crying that just leaves you wrenching and your stomach cramping. I wanted to quit many times. I was either going to die in my cell working to become free once and for all, or I would emerge anew. That was my determination. I struggled to give voice or explain to another person what I had been through. How I now felt cleansed by this new spiritual experience. I was unable to find the words to explain it. It transcended all known adjectives of description, it was truly transcending.

I was in a new state of mind. However it would be years later that I could reflect on this as just the mere beginning of my spiritual journey. The weekend was here and I wanted to get caught up with the news, televisions shows and just relax with the guys. I had been absent from all of these for three days. Monday was a court date. Unbeknownst to me, it would prove to be just another of many hills for me to climb.

Chapter Four

Monday was one of many preliminary hearings as this was the normal routine for past six months. You get an early rise, breakfast and to be then transferred down to a holding cell in the basement. This is next to the courts to wait till I met with my attorney. You would be down there for a minimum of four hours or as long as eight hours in a ten foot by ten foot holding cell with anywhere from five to fifteen other inmates from our pods. We had nothing to read, nothing to do, no television, no radio, just us sitting and waiting in idleness.

When my attorney finally arrived, I was told that today the District Attorney would be presenting his final preliminary findings. He would also request a determined prison sentence. I had already known that I would more than likely be accepting a plea bargain, as I knew I was guilty. The news from my attorney immediately charged my anger and I exploded. "What do you mean all you could get from him was a thirty years sentence. That is not a plea deal but is a bribe with the devil. Hell no! That I won't sign up for," was what I shouted to my attorney through a solid glass window with just a few holes drilled in so we could communicate. He told me this was just the first of many offers that would be coming. It's like a legal game, which can takes months or even years to finally get what is acceptable. I had no clue; this was my first brush with the law to this extent. We went to court, listened to the findings from the DA, and then I was put back into the holding tank to wait again to be taken up to my cell. My attorney came back to talk to me, and explained now it was his turn to investigate and present his preliminary findings to the DA and courts. This would take at least three months maybe more.

Riding high from my previous weekend's spiritual renewal I was crushed and thinking how I could ever deal with thirty years behind bars in a prison. It was as if my life did not matter, my dreams, my existence and chance to prove what my life could become did not matter. I was again depressed, even at times wishing I would just die. I was losing my will to live. I was not suicidal I just did not want to live

any more if it meant for me to be away from those I love, my dreams, aspirations for thirty plus years. Again came thoughts of “*how did I ever get to this point*” that I could hurt another person in grossly criminal way that my sentence could be thirty-six years.

Back in my cell, I cried, wept tears of fear, loathing and self-depreciating. I did not even want to make my weekly calls to my parents or sister or friend Michael G. What I did not know was how much love and support my family were really giving me. It was out of my sight in many ways. My attorney came to visit me a few days later stating that my father was concerned that I had not called him after my Monday court date. My dad respected my dealing with the news but wanted to talk to me. And he had been calling my attorney about every day at least twice a day since he found out that I was in jail. I was shocked. I was also hurt that my actions had caused this pain to be visited upon my family. With that thought came another spiritual breakthrough.

My actions caused great pain and hurt to another human being and their family. That hit my gut like a sack of potatoes being swung into my stomach. My actions, my words, my thoughts had caused another great suffering. I had not even thought of my victim in such a manner. This pain I felt fueled my fire to grow spiritually so I could know I would never hurt another soul again. So many repercussions are there from such unloving actions, not to mention the legal repercussions. When we inflict suffering onto another not only do they suffer, but we suffer too. You reap what you sow. That is called karma. Man, did I ever screw up to the max this time. And the repercussions may just take away my life for the duration of my adult years. And on that note, my actions may cause another (my victim) severe pain and suffering for years to come. How did I ever get so low in my decision-making process to where my actions were unloving to a creation of God? This thought I sat with for many years to come and still to this day I am reminded how my actions have immediate results upon others. My actions are either loving and a positive thing, or they are unloving and cause much suffering for others including myself. There is enough pain in this world, and I wanted to start making decisions that brought forth love and peace and not suffering.

I broke down and called my father that night. He was almost in tears, not because of the court hearing, but that I was not calling him as often as I could. He reassured me we would as a family work our way through this. But what was important is that I remain in contact with my family. They wanted to give me love, support and help me stay focused. Even though my actions that placed me in jail were unloving, my family struggled to make it loud and clear to me that I was loved. They wanted to be there even though they were thousands of miles away from California. My family back home in Oklahoma was rallying to make sure I had the best support they could offer. They wanted me to call often as I could so they could keep my mind focus on change, to focus on happy thoughts...and would worry when I became silent. It is hard with out the emotional support for someone in prison or jail to take on the task of changing. Support is essential.

Time to regroup and get my mind focused. If I were training for a fight I would be working out every day. For me to be of any help to my legal counsel, then I had best begin my spiritual training. For after all, I could not go back in time and fix my bad actions. All I could do now was to move forward. To do this in such a way that would benefit others and myself. I knew I would have to answer to the courts for my bad behavior, and I would have to ultimately accept the best offer I could get. But crying, and worrying, or spending my time in anger would not help anyone. It would not serve me well in preparing for the transformation I so wanted and desired in my heart. Time to become a warrior.

My friend Michael G. had sent me in a small book of the “Way of Chung Tzu”. I took to heart all those conversations reflecting on the life lessons in the Don Juan books. I had some of the preliminary tools in my possession to become a warrior, but I had to discipline myself with my spiritual training.

I begun to wake early in the morning, eat my breakfast and then get back into my cell for some reading. I tried to keep a journal and reviewing the lessons I was learning. I would read, take notes, and

then write about what I had read in my journal. I was soaking in everything I was learning and making sure I kept a daily review. I wanted to commit what I was learning to memory.

One of my readings led me to the Buddha's Eight Fold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path explains a way to end suffering, as Siddhartha Gautama taught. It is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development. Its goal is to free the individual from attachments and delusions. It finally leads to understanding the truth about all things. Together with the Four Noble Truths it constitutes the elements of Buddhism. Much emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of existence. The eight aspects of the path are not to be understood as a sequence of single steps, instead they are highly interdependent principles that have to be seen in relationship with each other. They are symbiotically intertwined with each other.

The Four Noble Truths are that, (1) Life means suffering, (2) The origin of suffering is attachment, (3) The cessation of suffering is attainable, (4) There is a path of ending suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path states that, (1) Right Understanding, (2) Right Intention, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration.

These two elements are part of the foundation of Buddhism; it also mirrors the esoteric teachings of Christ. Christ came to free the captives, to heal the sick. It is by exercising spiritual practices and changing our mindset that allow us to evolve into a transformed person. Sometimes hearing things from a fresh source (Buddhism) allows one of faith (Christian) to fully understand what hidden meanings Jesus talked about. Whatever your faith may be, Buddhist readings help you understand and apply your faith more meaningfully.

Chapter Five

My thoughts from studying the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path were in my journal I was keeping at that time. I was raised a Southern Baptist, and around age ten my family became Lutheran. Sometime in our college life, both my sister and I become Roman Catholic. I was pretty much open-minded as our mother and father raised us to be. We would analyze and talk about complex spiritual natures during my youth. We would try to find the common denominator in what we were dialoguing about. Divine truth is divine truth; no one holds leverage over the other. I remember hearing what the Dali Lama once said, “When Buddha walked the earth he was not a Buddhist, and when Christ walked the earth, he was not a Christian. With all my readings I was doing in jail, I began to see some very common threads that anyone could use to strengthen their faith, no matter what religion they choose. After all it just beliefs. The practice is what lies beyond the beliefs. Outside of the box so to speak.

The first of the Noble Truths is that life means suffering. What did this mean to me? If my faith is accurate, then I was created in God’s image, which meant I was spirit. So living on earth meant suffering to some degree. Because spirits trapped in a human form means suffering to some extent. Looking back at what I had learned from revisiting my past, I began to see how much of life was suffering in one form or another. The second Noble Truth is the origin of suffering is attachment. I was awaking to this truth. The pain and suffering I endured as a child resulted in my keeping those memories fresh, or alive in my mind’s memory. Keeping those thoughts of pain and suffering as vivid in my minds eye as they were at the time it happened, meant my attachment to them was causing me suffering. The third Noble Truth meant that I had the power within me to cease that suffering. The fourth Noble Truth reaffirms that there is a way out of the suffering.

Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly,”. What is abundant life except that

which is free of suffering? My lower self (ego) tries to keep me from my abundance (higher self). I think I am beginning to see how Christ's words are a foundation that has common threads of truth flowing through other religions and faiths. It is not the messenger we should be focused upon but rather the message.

The Eightfold Path is full of similarities of what Jesus taught. To have right understanding is that I must replace my (ego) self-thinking and replace it with a more loving and accepting view of others. Am I trying to become more "religious" appearing or end the suffering by seeking the truth? What is my intention? Right speech is that I speak of love, peace and the end of all suffering. My speech should not cause others or myself suffering. Right action means all I do, how I act, work, behave is quantified by the understanding that all I do should end my suffering and others. All other types of action are only causing more suffering for others and myself. Right livelihood means that my job and how I earn money should not cause suffering to others or myself. Right effort is the energy I use to get things done. Is it helpful in freeing others and myself from suffering? Or is it causing suffering? Right mindfulness means that I am present in the present moment only. Right concentration is about how I use my mind and contemplation. Is it helpful in freeing others and myself from suffering? Is it causing more suffering for others and myself?

So by my applying the Noble Four Truths with the Eightfold Path, then my life becomes one of ending suffering for others and myself. This same thought is echoed in Romans 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God." Colossians 3:2 says, "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth." I had to ask myself what is good? What does it mean to be conformed to this world? What does it mean to be reformed in the newness of my mind for me to prove what is good?

After much thought and prayer, I did come to see how applying the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path was needed in my spiritual transformation. I was on a journey that would in some ways

be for the rest of my life. And I had to replace all the bad suffering thoughts with new positive and non-suffering thoughts.

What brought me to jail was my own suffering, which evolved from a series of actions that caused suffering to others. And to that point, my suffering now in jail was due to my own wrong actions, wrong speech, wrong views, and wrong intentions. My suffering caused me to inflict more suffering onto others. My victims suffered. My family suffered. And taxes had to be paid to pay for my jail and prison time, which could have been used to help others more in need. My actions caused many others to suffer. I was thankful that I knew there was a path to end this suffering. I wanted nothing more than to start on that path. And the path happened to be the jail I was presently in.

Looking back over my life, I began to see a pattern of attachment to pain and suffering. Allowing that suffering to overtake my thinking, daydreams, and actions. What I did to others was a way of unleashing myself from the pain and suffering I had been exposed to. That is wrong action, but I saw now how each part plays into the part of the next. It is a cycle. The cycle of suffering. And Jesus said he came to set the captives free and let them experience life more abundantly. The challenge was to end my cycle of attachment to my suffering. And look for the truth in my transformation.

Meditation proved to be a useful tool for this. In a later chapter I will share on how Fr. Thomas Keating explains the psychological benefits of meditation. The more we meditate the more crud breaks away from our heart. Thus we are open for a fresh new area of our heart to invite divine love in. Divine love then grows stronger in our hearts. We begin to express divine love. But meditation is a shortened path to enlightenment. For that I am living proof. So are many others that have done this before me. And a lot of them did it while they were in prison.

Chapter Six

It was soon that more changes challenged my growth. The experience of jail and ultimately prison proved to be my lessons in learning these spiritual truths. Each episode or experience opened yet another avenue for learning. It was like jail and prison became a school. While this is what I think our forefathers had hoped for in making prisons, for the most part the prison system in America today is just to warehouse the inmates. It does not provide adequate opportunities in bettering one self, and for that matter obtaining the spiritual training needed to be truly free from their bad choices. One has to do the work for their self. One has to seek it out for it is not openly provided for in our prison systems, which is very sad. It is like our society just wants to rid themselves of persons acting inappropriately, instead of finding the root cause of their actions and helping them change that.

Had it not been for the kind support from my family, friends, and countless publishers and organizations that sent me books, I don't think I would or could have rehabilitated myself. For that I will be ever be grateful. And in a chapter to come later, this humbleness for my own transformation will show itself again with the work I currently do for others that are incarcerated.

One thing jail and prison does to persons is demoralize and attempt to break them down on so many different levels, which in some ways attributes to the many prisoners dealing with depression and other mental issues. To start with, while you are in jail, all visits are behind thick glass walls. There is no human touch allowed between the inmates and the visitor. Even with your attorney, everything is behind glass. When you go to court and return you are strip searched and made to do things no human should have to. However, due to the availability of introducing contraband into the secured facility you can understand some of the procedures.

You have no rights to anything while you are in custody. The officers go through and do periodic cell searches and you come back from your court day to find all your belongings on the floor. Sometimes your journal or records keeping files are missing. I was quick to note that anything to do with your case should not be written down. While in jail you could have your own notes confiscated and be turned over to the District Attorney. While this is not supposed to happen, it frequently does. The system is flawed, but again, I had no one to blame but myself for being put in such a place. You kind of learn the ropes to the system as you go along.

One time, an inmate who was mad, and wanted to stir up crap, which is an element in jail, had scratched a rather veiled threat on the bottom of his dinner tray. There were those who did not want to go along with the program. Unbeknownst to us, the message caused quite an alarm for the officers. While we never found out the true message of what was conveyed, the repercussions lasted for us three days. The next three days, the extraction squad came into our pod. Each and every cell was thoroughly searched, destroying most of the belongings of the inmates. The drug dogs were brought in, and those with excessive commissary were written up and the food destroyed. All this proved to no avail, as no weapons, drugs or notes had any information that warranted such a disarray of our pod units. As it turns out the inmate who had scratched something on his tray, was just angry and took out his anger on all of us. When this was found out the officers were just as angry. So for the next two days, at all hours of day, squad training took place inside our pod. They used the flash pop bang grenades. They also had rifles with little rubber balls hitting our walls and doors. No one got any rest or sleep for days.

While this is not the norm, it did prove how others and their actions could cause you problems. How we respond to that either can bring peace or keeps the chaos going. Many of the other inmates were mad and their anger controlled their actions and speech. The mood for days inside our pod was tense. This experience showed me how we can play into our anger or choose to just let be in the past.

From my early readings of “Awakening of Faith” taught me to use the mantra when approaching meditation as, “the past is hazy as a

dream, the present is like lightening, and the future is like clouds rising up suddenly.” We spend so much of our mental energy replaying the past over and over again. The past is that, it has nothing to do with the present moment. Replaying the past also fuels our emotions and keeps us locked in our past. It also can feed the fire of our anger. And then all that energy that is stored in us has to come out either in angry speech or angry actions.

While incarcerated one has to be in control instead of allowing the situation to control us. How we respond to the present moment dictates how our center of balance is affected. Are the scales equal and still? Or are they tipping to the right or left? We can’t control the actions of others, but most certainly can control how we respond to the present moment and others.

It is so easy while incarcerated to allow the exterior circumstances to control your mental energies. I did, and I felt miserable. I was angry, edgy, and was not a good person to be around. All that negative energy permeated my presence. It was like this cloud of angeriness floated out about four feet in front of me, warning others to stay away. When I learned I could through meditation practices, focus only on the present moment, and not allow my mind to think of the past or future, I was more centered and calm. It also provided me the state of mind to navigate around prison where I did not get caught up in the drama.

There are times too the officers played head games with you, doing all they can to push your buttons. The other inmates also try to push your buttons. If you are in a calm and balanced state, then your reactions are not what they had hoped for. If you can do this, they seem to move on to another person to help them get the response they desire. If you play into the games, then you get caught up with the games. You get lost with the chaos and confusion. Then that energy is part of your inner space, which only keeps you wrapped up in illusions. This prevents true spirit to exist. Learning to use meditation to control your thoughts keeps you balanced. It also helps you do your time your way, instead of being a pawn in others games.

How you spend your time is your business. I learned from other lifers and others who had been in prison before, the best thing one can do is have their own program. And stick to yourself. If you have your own program, you don't get played. You don't get caught up in the games, which can cause even more suffering for yourself and others.

Some of the ones I saw who did not have the balance of mind caused more harm to themselves. They either did what others mandated or allowed their anger to get the best of them. On several occasions their actions caused them to get more time added to their sentence. Then their anger increased, and it became what seemed to be a never-ending cycle of suffering. This cycle kept their minds from seeing past the illusions. The illusions they were living which were sadly created by themselves.

Around the late spring of 1995 there was talk in the news of a long unsolved case possibly coming to an end and being solved. They had arrested a woman who was accused of murdering her daughters about ten years prior. Her son was transferred from Arizona State Prison to testify in the case. He was housed with us in our pod. He brought in some knowledge that was respected from many in our pod. For the most part, some of the ones fighting their cases were first time inmates. Thus their knowledge of what to expect and how to live in prison was not their forte. This young man, Robert Knorr, had been down for about several years. So we all talked to him and used him like one would use an encyclopedia.

Through the weeks there was information leaking to local media. As well Knorr's interviews with local media became fodder for us to discuss in the pod. The spiritual readings I was doing made me see how sad this situation was. I begun to see this cycle of early suffering by children that affects them the rest of their life. I was seeing how the truths when and if applied could change things for the better, but when left unchecked would create this etheric cycle of

suffering and dysfunction that robs persons of an abundant life. I began to see this as I listened to Knorr or read of his interviews.

Again, going back to the Four Noble Truths, there is a path that can lead to cessation of suffering. One of the first decisions one has to make is whether he wants freedom or to remain in the cycle of suffering. When I talked to others about what I was doing, I always respected where they were coming from. As well I respected what their tolerance level was. Everyone will awake at some point, but not at the same time as others. You've got to respect others and the decisions they make for their own life. We get caught up in the wrong cycle when we allow our minds to judge or quantify others state of being. All we are responsible for in this life is our own life...no one else's, just ours. But there is a path that leads to the end of all suffering. For me during my time in jail and prison I worked on freeing myself from the cycle of suffering. It can happen, and it did happen. But it was not an overnight process and still to this day there are areas of my life, which I still work on freeing.

Once you go through the cleansing state, such as I did when I took three days in my cell to review my whole life, you begin to awake more. It brings an awareness of the cycles when they happen. There is an awareness I had that was never before present in my life.

When we listened to the life of Knorr I was saddened that as a young kid he was subjected to abuse, both physical and mental. This shaped how he would act as an adult. That suffering he endured ultimately cost him his freedom to enjoy life on the outside.

Chapter Seven

It was around mid-April of 1995 that my attorney was able to work a deal with the District Attorney that was agreeable with all parties involved. I was given a six-year sentence with time served. Basically I had just less than two years to do in state prison. Also the time in county jail had given me the time needed to begin the process of my spiritual transformation. I had grown to incorporate a healthier character and moral code that I wanted in my life. I remember what one inmate had said about our present way of thinking. Our best thinking got us into jail, so we had to change our thinking process to be successful once released. That was some very useful advice.

This places us back to the first chapter with my arrival at Folsom Prison. Prison life is much different than jail. You have access to yard time; you spend more time out of your cell and a broader base of persons to interact with. A dear friend in Sacramento who had done time before helped me see the advantage of listing my nationality as American Indian. I was a member of my tribe and had participated in our tribal ceremonies and customs most of my life. When I got to prison I saw then the importance of this advice. Your circle of friends depends on your race and how that race interacts with the other races inside. It is strange and awkward but one has to realize that prison is different than real life. You just have to follow it or it can and will cause you much suffering.

In some ways I thought my new way of thinking would benefit the masses in prison. But reality is that sometimes it is best to adapt, follow the rules, and do your own program. As well, it's the lifer's house and you should respect the codes they have set up to live by. Especially if it does not harm another and cause you to do things you know are wrong. Respect goes a long way in prison. Show respect and you get respect back.

In prison, rather than jail, you could at that time smoke in your cell, make coffee and have real food items you can cook. Cooking in prison is not easy unless you have a stinger (submersion heater instrument) to warm your water. In the first few weeks, one just rolls

up a wad of toilet paper with a hollow area in the middle and use it as one would use a sterno can to heat up your water. Your cooking pot of choice is an empty can of Bugler tobacco with a metal bottom. It was nice to be able to eat, drink coffee and smoke a cigarette on your own bunk. Prison life is so much better than jail. That is why some just hurry the process so they can leave jail early and finish their time in prison.

Routine for me was not as fast as I would have liked it. But it is what it is. Luckily in some ways my typing skills were such that I landed a job as a clerk after a few months. The guys I worked around were cool and somewhat reminded me of college fraternity friends. There was an instant bond since we were all inmates. We looked out for each other. It was nice to have a daily routine which helps pass the time. I had afternoon and early evening shift in Three building. Trying to occupy my daytime was a challenge at first. Waking up at 5:30AM and then back to bed to sleep. I normally stayed up till midnight or 1 am. Finally I found a rhythm that worked for me.

Once settled in, I began my routine, which for me was reading in the morning, yard time at noon, meditation in the afternoon then work. At night I journaled what I had read that day and wrote letters before hitting the sack at night. Being a clerk had it privileges. I did not have to have a cellmate unless I wanted one. I stayed to myself and just kept my routine for a few months. One morning I did notice a new worker on the floor crew, which was responsible for cleaning, waxing and upkeep of Building Three. We talked a few times and his energy seemed interesting for some reason. I can't put it quite into words but something about his energy matched what I knew would help pass the time.

His name was Johnathan, and as it turned out he had been incarcerated since age eleven. In some ways he had become institutionalized but had a happy go lucky attitude. He also played guitar and since music was part of my past, I knew we could pass time playing and singing. At the time I did not know what a blessing it was to have him as a cellmate and we still to this day remain friends. In

some ways we both were good for each other in that we brought learning experiences to each other.

At first, Johnathan was very involved in the Protestant church group, and in many ways thought my mix of Catholic faith with Buddhism thrown in was of the devil. Several times our discussions got out of hand in a comical sort of way. The other convicts on our tier would tease us about our late into the morning holy wars. He provided me the means to test my faith and learn that I really commit to memory my newfound spiritual truths. We got to the point where we debated but did not argue. This helped me in the way to round out what I really believed and how the truth I was learning could be applied to anyone. Although Johnathan at the time would make fun of me with my disciplines and rituals, in later years he came around to see the value in them. For me, once I paroled, I never went back to prison. Johnathan on the other hand kept coming back. He still struggles with temporary visits in prison for a short amount of time. Although, as he as told me recently, the meditation and practices I did when we were cellmates, have helped him grow spiritually now. So in some ways our time as cellmates was a planting of the seed sort of thing for him, which harvested later in his life.

One aspect to our being cellmates is his family originally came from Oklahoma. We were more like brothers than strangers. We talked of our plans after paroling, our families and talked about our younger years. We shared similar issues that we still both were working on to heal. Those talks and sharing helped us to bond in a way that allowed us to see each other and for that matter other inmates as works in progress.

Our time in our cells was to us our home away from home. We played music, had a radio, or talked. We treated each other as best friends. This helped in passing our time as it went quicker and was not filled with negative energy or fights. Many of the other inmates would have issues with their cellmates and were always moving new people in. Johnathan I compromised in a lot of ways and tolerated the small things that could get on our nerves. We only really argued over the more important issues.

I remember one Halloween, with me as a clerk; Johnathan sometimes ran on my juice card (juice is term for power or privileges granted to some in prison) and would run the tiers at night when I was working. He never really caused any problems but he would “escape” from the cell lockdowns at night and run the tiers. One Halloween, he sat on our washing bucket (ten gallon white tub) and was passing out candy to all who passed our cell. Officer Mica came by and Johnathan said, “Let me guess you are dressed up as a cop.” Everyone on the tier around earshot of that laughed, Officer Mica did not. That was just how Johnathan was. We both knew we were in prison, but that thought did not keep us from being like college boys having fun. As I said it really helped pass the time and helped take the edge off the realities of being in Folsom Prison.

I know all this may sound like a normal life but there was plenty going on that made us fully aware of the reality of what prison life was like. The countless times two of the races would jump off against each other ending in a melee of fighting and gunfire from the guards. This brought reality back to home for us quickly. Many times the fights were over small things but some were really complex issues that caused the Mexicans to be locked down for three months. Some of our tier mates were Latinos. We felt helpless over us getting to go out to eat in the dining hall, go to yard and other privileges we had.

One time one incident really touched us both in a deep way. Johnathan was really a decent guitar player. He would play with a circle of musicians on the yard at night and during the day when he had a day off. One of the fellow guitarists become a very close friend to Johnathan and treated me with much respect. In return we both treated him with equal respect. We never really ever got involved with the day to day or what programs the person was involved with. Many lifers have a sort of hustle or thing they are known for to earn a few extra canteen items. Steve’s hustle was his wife bringing him heroin in balloons. He would swallow them in the visiting room and then sell the drugs later. We did not judge him nor did we talk about it, we just let people do their own program and stick to ours. That’s the code, keep to your self and don’t get involved in other’s business. The last

time Steve visited his wife, one of the balloons busted inside his stomach. This was while he was just sitting in the visitation room. We were told he turned various shades of colors on his face and then just fell over dead. It was one of the moments in prison when everyone was just quiet and somber. This really shook up Johnathan, as they were good friends. It was an up close and personal experience for me in showing me just how quick wrong actions can backfire. To be truly successful, one must be diligent in keeping focused on right actions and right livelihood. Rest in Peace Steve, you were one great guitar player. This would be one of several deaths that affected many of us while in Folsom.

Another time Johnathan and I just had one of those days that we both should not have been talking to each other. We ended up fighting like schoolboys inside a ten-foot by six-foot cell. We both were laughing by the end of the fight, but I was bleeding. Without thinking, I grabbed my sheet from my bed and wiped it off. In prison you never want to wipe blood on your shirt, pants or anything of state issue for someone will find it and there will be an investigation. I hollered for a clerk who was on the tier that was friends with Johnathan. I told him to throw the sheet away and get it off the tier immediately. Well he threw it down to the laundry cart. Just when an officer was walking by a white sheet with huge fresh bloodstains fell in front of him. Naturally he had to investigate. Tier by tier, cell by cell a quick walk through was done by eight guards. Naturally in prison, someone will say something and they converged on our cell. We both were escorted out, searched our cells thoroughly, and I mean thoroughly searched. We both were taken to the nurse on duty, ordered to strip. She searched us for any signs of a fight. Luckily it was my head that was hit, and for some odd reason they did not search either Johnathan's head or mine. We naturally were released back to our cell but not before Sergeant Bair said he would one way or the other get Johnathan and me and get us to the hole. That day never came, but I can tell you, there were many opportunities for that to happen, Johnathan and I just watched each others back and made sure we kept to our stories.

Another time we had to cell sit for a friend of ours baby kitten while he went away for three days for some medical tests. Johnathan and I kept this furry little kitten in our cell. And for the most part away from the knowledge of the officers. It was really nice to have something so small to take care of. In some ways, having an animal is kind of nice to break the routine. That little creation from God kept us cheerful and happy for three days. One night when I was at work, my Lieutenant raised his little window to ask me how the cat was doing? I was a bit shocked. I said, "I don't have a cat." He said well if I did, I might want to loan him out for a few hours that evening. I immediately went up to my cell and did just that. Within a few minutes of course my cell was searched and no cat was to be found. The officers were a bit miffed, but just carried on as if it that was that. Luckily the next morning our friend returned and we gave him his cat back. All was well.

In prison life is like life on the outside. It is what we make of it. It is our choices that determine our future and our present state of mind. I still struggle today with some things, I am blessed that they are smaller than the bigger ones I had to tackle in prison. What I hope I convey with some of the stories here and especially this chapter, is that I am human. I still make mistakes; I made mistakes as I learned to expand my spiritual lessons. A friend recently said, "That is why this is called a practice." We practice our faith, we practice our growth, and it is every evolving. There is always change. This is just a documentation of part of my journey. I still am on my journey and will continue till I take my last breath.

My mom was very faithful to help assist and support me while I was in prison. I got regular mail in with stamps and store bought greeting cards from her. My cards were my hustle and I sold them to add to my canteen stock. During Christmas, since I was classified as Native American, I was able to do things most weren't able to. I always gave the shot callers about 20 Christmas cards with stamps to pass out to their fellow inmates in fish row. So their families would at least get a card from them that year. The Asians, American Indians, African American, Latinos and the Whites shot callers were given these gifts each year. At first they did not know how to take this, but in time the genuineness of my offer really helped show many just how I was. I also got a lot of respect from the lifers and others for this.

Chapter Eight

For the most part, life just rolled by, week-by-week, day-to-day. I was very active in the Catholic church and joined the men there in great dialogues. I was riding high on my job as a clerk, and not pushing the juice card above what I knew would be tolerated. Others and myself were just doing our work, and passing time the best way possible.

One of the projects we started at the Catholic church was dividing up the rosary into part of ten decades. Assigning a decade to each volunteer and praying that decade everyday. We did this in unison with others world wide as part of a Rosary prayer chain. This was a pivotal moment for me. It showed me how as inmates, even behind bars, we could unite in common good and do something collectively for the good. The organizing of this project helped move me towards my next project which would literally change the lives of many at Folsom. Even to the point that this next project still is affecting inmates to this day, some almost twelve years later.

The Rosary decade project did get some press in some international Catholic newsletters. This positive stroke was helpful for the men, and encouraged them to continue to do things that helped others. It helped them grow with empathy for their own spiritual transformation.

As I stated before so much of how you're treated by some officers is like a sentence above and beyond your original sentence. They seem to derive joy out making things harder or more demeaning to the inmates. So any positive strokes or activities to do which can bring personal self-esteem is always welcomed to prisoners. One such positive thing was a Friday morning and Monday afternoon Catholic study group. Our volunteer was a free man called Michael K. He was so pure and full of light and love. Most of these talks were about how we all were the same. That as prisoners we were dealing with issues we were trying to overcome, and he reassured us that persons on the

outside were dealing with similar issues. He did not treat us as an object of loathing, but freely gave us his time to help us worship in way that showed us we all are divine children of God.

His talks centered on opening up space within our selves for the Holiness of God. Yet his approach helped us broaden our awareness in finding God within anything. He used to bring in oversized enlargements of the Calvin and Hobbs comic strip. These tools helped opened up dialogue with about eight to fifteen men each session. He would give practical, every day examples on how we might invite God into our inner most being. In so many ways the presentations by Michael K. paralleled the studies and books I was reading. I remember we struck up an instant kinship and would discuss such things as what I was studying in class during our smoke breaks.

Throughout the years of late fall 1995 and Spring 1996 Michael K. and I would talk about various aspects of his lessons and how they hinted at meditation but did not come right out and talk about meditation. He was testing to the waters to see if anyone would be interested in strictly a meditation group. Sometime around early spring 1996 while discussing a conference he just attended in which Thich Nhat Hanh had spoke, he asked me if the guys would be open to a purely meditation instruction class. I was excited for that is what I wanted, so I said yes. The Monday afternoon class really did not take to the class and we both were stumped. We both were not yet ready to give up, but knew we had to find others that were interested in meditation.

A dear fellow clerk, and Catholic, was my friend Diago. I asked him on the probabilities of finding others interested in a meditation class. He was interested and asked if he could talk to a few lifers on what could be done. He spoke with several other lifers, Paul and Frenchie. These lifers with me, the short termers and outside volunteer Michael K., were about to witness a miracle. The lifers talked amongst themselves and had been interested in a contemplative fellowship. Each of them had studied for years various paths and religions that embraced contemplation as a method for spiritual awakening. As well, it would prove to be the lifers, Paul, Frenchie, and

Diago who helped frame the way this sort of fellowship could exist in prison and be successful. Within a few weeks we were ready to have a discussion with our Catholic chaplain. Michael K. along with the four lifers and myself in the upstairs balcony of Greystone Chapel met. The group would be inmate ran, with a sponsor, Michael K., under the Catholic programs. We all decided the best approach would be Centering Prayer written by Fr. Thomas Keating. As most of us had read his book, "Open Mind, Open Heart," it was also decided that to get this started was to utilize a Northern California support group of Fr. Thomas Keating which would present the Centering Prayer workshop just like they did in churches on the outside. The lifers would help get the participants to sign up and come for the introduction class.

That Friday arrived and we had about thirty persons all inside Greystone Chapel for a two-hour slide show, PowerPoint, and video presentation on the concept and reasoning behind Centering Prayer as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating. We were told, that Fr. Thomas Keating himself had been contacted, gave his blessings, and this would be the first time Centering Prayer ever was taught inside a prison. History was being made and it originated with inmates.

One thing that stands out to me is the majority of the inmates attending I had not ever met, and for that matter never really came to any meetings after that. I gave it no thought. Until recently I never knew this. By miraculous circumstances my friend Daigo was released a few years back and we have remained friends. I asked him recently about that first night, and he shared with me who all was there and why. The older lifers knew that if the contemplative fellowship was to last, it had to be run with ground rules agreed upon by all the shot callers from all the different races in prison. Unbeknownst to me at that time, the shot callers were being asked to attend the workshop to see what it was all about and would be asked to sign off that their fellow inmates from that race would be free to attend if they so chose. Also, it was agreed that it was to be neutral ground, meaning that no prison politics or gang activities would go on inside the meeting. As well the lifers guaranteed to the shot callers that what would be taught would be ecumenical and not in any way try to get their members or

associates to denounce their gang affiliation. It was like a meeting of heads of states. After that meeting and workshop, all inmates agreed and the fellowship was thus birthed.

My job was to rally the materials needed for a library. I began to write away to all known publishers from many different spiritual paths that held common elements of meditation. Within a short time we had over one hundred books for the members of our group to read or check out. Fr. Thomas Keating sent in some videos and cassette tapes of his teaching. As well a local Catholic church donated about thirty cassette players for our members to check out and listen to the tapes. It was really exciting to see what wonderful resources we got in. Thich Nhat Hanh's publishing company, Parallax Press donated many books and teaching materials. So did many other Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Celtic, and Native American publishers send in materials, books, papers, and videos. Our group could check out what they were interested in.

Our initial group slowly grew from ten members up to over forty members within a few short weeks. We would have an inmate led short discussion on spirituality, and then take a break, and come back for a twenty-minute silent meditation. That was our format we stuck with and it lasted approximately an hour. This also allowed some time for the members to peruse the library to check out books. This always took place on Friday's at 7pm, and would allow for most members to just drop by during nightly yard time. In time we all chose to officially name our group based on Fr. Keating's groups, and we were officially the Folsom branch of Contemplative Fellowship.

In the next chapter we will look at several experiences many of the men had while in the fellowship. As we learned in Fr. Keating's video discussions, our experiences are similar to those of anyone who begins a steady program of meditation. This ancient tradition dates back to the earliest church fathers that were known as the Desert Fathers. In many ways, we were the modern version of this. The Desert Fathers lived in caves, and the inmates lived inside cells and used our time to transform our lives with spiritual reading and contemplation.

Chapter Nine

When I first began to practice meditation, I had not yet been incarcerated, and was under the tutelage of my friend Michael G. and I could not last more than five minutes. In time training my mind to look past the “sailing ships” of thoughts, I was able to get up to ten minutes. Michael G. explained it was not the quantity that mattered in the beginning it was the intent. That helped ease my frustrations in learning to sit in silence. I really liked the approach that Michael G. gave me. He even went so far as to say that when you find yourself deliberately meditating at the same time each day, and you are so focused on that alone, then it is time to let a few days pass without meditation. It is not supposed to be a chore, task, or routine. It is a practice. Thich Nhat Hanh has a loving approach in his meditation approach. Meditation in a way is about self-love in that it helps us to get us back to the center of our being, our soul.

Those sitting practices in the magic monastery at Michael G.’s house were transforming, in that for the first time I really glimpsed of how much activity or mind energy is used in thinking about fruitless thoughts. My mind was very active in engaging in thoughts that led to nowhere of importance. It was like white noise just to fill the void. However, we are created so that in that void we can find our true self. That void, that precious silence in the present moment is where God exists. At first the most noted significant benefit from this meditation practice was a peace of mind that I had never felt or experienced before. In some ways my continuance with this practice was to see where it led and how much benefit I could get. It was if I were on a search for the most ultimate spiritual prize ever found as if that was an altruistic destination. But in reality I was seeking for a medal or award. While this is not the true choice of goals, it was just where I was during this stage of my spiritual development. You just have to go with where you are at and love yourself at that stage. This practice is filled with love. And if you don’t love yourself while you struggle to practice then your not loving yourself properly.

While I was in county jail I had more time on my hands and I began to practice meditating there. I continued with this practice in prison. Over time, which was now about two years of daily practice, I noticed part of my heart opening up with more compassion. There was an intense form of love growing inside my soul where I could cry (at a drop of a hat) when I was talking or thinking about something associated with love. As well, different parts of my life began to come to mind after a meditation session and I noticed that this was helping to heal past hurts. While at the time I was not fully conscious of this happening, I did notice I was able to revisit painful experiences and find a thread of forgiveness. Which just opened more space for more love.

As time passed, these experiences began to happen more frequently and with such vast emotional release that I felt like my old life was burning off to find room for new spiritual growth. In some of my readings it talked about this. As well by this time I had made friends with some lifers who also were Buddhist practioners. One such friendship was with Lurch, who was six-foot six inches and about two-hundred fifty pounds. He was tattooed all over with mostly white pride or neo-Nazi symbolism. Prior to his reading and practicing Buddhist precepts he was one bad mother. I am sure he had done things that was not easy for him to live with himself. We never talked about that too much, as I knew him as he was today and accepted him. We all have a past, and if this practice teaches us anything it is to accept the present moment and not the past. I asked him one day if he ever had experiences like I did. He said he had and read of many others who had too. It is part of the process in meditation where our old karma, (sins), break away making room for new spiritual and loving energy. Lurch was very helpful and offered me not only companionship and fellowship but treated me as a fellow spiritual seeker. Many a day or nights we would walk the yard talking about spiritual thoughts, practices and questions. He also taught me to look within and use my books to find the truth. He said no one had all the answers, that our path is there for us to find our self. He also had a very dry sense of humor and I loved it when we talked about the Dali Lama. He would deliberately write it as Dolly Lama. He did so with the understanding that no one can take themselves as higher or better than another. We

all are the same. And I have to be honest, seeing the Dolly Lama brought a new appreciation for the humanness of the Dali Lama.

During our Friday night Contemplative Fellowships at Greystone Chapel, we would occasionally watch videos that Fr. Thomas Keating or Richard Rohr would send us. Both of these great mediation teachers spoke on the psychological transformation in a meditation practice. Fr. Thomas would draw concentric circles in which he says, our bad crud inside our hardened hearts would finally be chipped away and flung out of our being by this energy within the concentric circles. Rohr also spoke on how this transformation is making us anew within the context of how Jesus said he would renew our hearts.

In time many of the inmates begin to see this energy changing them as well. I remember one lifer, Hound Dog. He was very much a crusty older man. He always had a frown on his face and his talk was filled with negativity. He reminded me of a Caucasian version of the character Redd Foxx played in Sanford and Sons. He was very good friends with Paul and Diago and they invited him to one of our meetings. He only went out respect he had for these two guys. Slowly with practice and encouragement from Paul and Diago he had begun a regular meditation program. In time his whole character changed. While he remained in many ways on the fringe of our fellowship, but that was just him. Our goal in our fellowship was not in gaining a certain number of members, but rather, to introduce meditation to any and all persons. Hound Dog begun to smile, enjoy life and would even go on the yard and tell the younger ones they would do their time a lot better if they came to our meetings instead of playing games on the yard. He was a changed man. And his story is told in the lives of many men that crossed our paths as we shared contemplative practices.

I remember discussing these changes with Michael K., our free volunteer for the group, on many occasions and we both would shed a few tears. The tears were out of pure joy on what a huge impact our message and ministry was giving the men behind bars. Our mission was to expose the trueness that exists in spiritual practices that has nothing to do with religion or church politics. We cared not what the

faith of a person was. We were only interested in helping the men be able to learn to sit for twenty minutes in silence. The practice alone would be the instrument of transformation, not our words, not our talk, not our preaching, simply meditation is the only tool needed.

When I paroled in October of 1997, this group continued. The membership grew to over three hundred alone in Folsom. With various transfers and other prisoners sending literature to other friends in California prisons, the Contemplative Fellowship grew. It is my understanding that by the summer of 2007, ten years after I left, it had grown to over three thousand men meditating daily within eight prisons. To have been given the gift of being one of five who helped begin this program, truly reflects the power of God. The trueness of the practice has kept this alive today in these prisons. We gave back to men a freedom they never knew existed. Instead of using our time to no avail, we chose to give back to others the tools they needed to truly free themselves. Prisoners only want to be free, and just not in the sense of getting out of prison, but getting out of the prison their lives had become. They want to end the cycle of suffering for all.

Chapter Ten

While we, those of us in the fellowship, collectively met and spent time together, prison life was continuing around us. Prison can sure help a person with spiritual practices in a wild and weird way. By early 1997 Folsom was changing. And it was not for the best. The older timers who had been in Folsom in the 1970's when it was a riotous rebellious atmosphere, began to take note that the younger ones coming in were bringing that element back.

One night while walking the yard, with my cassette player on playing a Siddha Yoga chant, I was oblivious to what was going on around me. I was in my own little world. My friend Lurch came and started to walk with me. He reached up and took off my earphones and said, "Do you hear that?" I didn't hear anything. It was deadly quiet. For a yard full of over one thousand men it is a strange for it be quiet. He walked me off the circle yard, which was a soccer field and baseball diamond with a running track along the edges. He walked me over to the Chapel and said for me to stay put. One thing I had learned in the two years I had been at Folsom, was that you respected what lifers say. While Lurch was walking back to the bleachers where all the whites sat, I noticed how the yard was fractionalized. Every race and every gang was in their respected area and all just congregated there. By the time Lurch sat down on the back part of the top of the bleachers, over by the handball courts where the Latinos were, all of sudden, in a flash of an eye, they huddled together. About three hundred plus all massed together within a short circle. You could tell one guy was in the middle, and he was talking to the others. In rotation the Latinos moved inward and outward, as if they moved in to talk or hear more closely. You could have heard a pin drop on that yard that moment.

Diago was in chapel too, as he was the new Catholic Chaplain clerk by then. I asked him what was going on, and he said, "They are fixing to rumble." He also pointed out the guards. He went on to explain that the old timers within the guard would not intervene. For if

they did, they knew a riot would ensue immediately. In prison when a shot caller calls his troops together, you leave them alone. Extra guards were called out, but with no alarm, just a short radio call through their walkie-talkies to gather in the yard. We had over fifty guards show up, in the catwalks above the yard, and to the side of the yard over by a holding area. But no guards were near the Latinos. Late night yard normally gets over with around 7:30pm and no later than 8pm. I looked at my watch and it was 7:50pm on that Tuesday night. I mentioned to Diago that we soon would be called in and all he did was laugh. He said no one was going anywhere, and they, the officers, would not call yard till the group of Latinos disbanded. Around 9:50pm that night we all walked back to our cells. Whatever the Latinos were talking about was not shared nor talked about. But there was an eerie feeling that was in the air. No one really said anything except we better be stocked up well with noodles (ramen noodles sold in canteen) in our cells. This meant the possibility of a lock down.

The next morning while I was preparing to go to breakfast, the alarms rang. Again that dead silence arose over the building and you could feel that haunting energy fill the prison itself. What seemed like two hours, of being locked in, not going to chow, with the alarm sounding; one could only imagine what was going on inside the prison somewhere.

It turned out that the Latinos did rumble. While I don't know what the reason was, during breakfast that morning, one Latino from another gang had picked up the plastic mop head wringer from the mop bucket and begun to use it against another Latino in the chow line. Friends that were there said they were ducking and getting under the metal chow tables. It was a small riot, but one that lasted for over thirty minutes, and many persons were badly hurt. When something like this happens, it is mandatory lockdown.

While the guards are separating those who were fighting, and sending to the medical clinic those that needed medical attention, it took them two hours to get the scene cleared. Finally everyone was marched back to their cells with the overhead speaker telling us, "LOCKDOWN."

Now we all would be in our cells for the rest of the day, no special privileges, everyone in their cells for at least the next twenty-four hours. For the most part, when the riots are restricted to a certain race, by the next day all other races are allowed out and routine life follows. Only the race of those rioting are still locked down. That means they are in their cells till the guards say they can come out again. Sack lunches are brought to their cells three times a day. No showers, except when they remain in lockdown for over three days, then they are taken out in limited numbers to shower.

For me lockdowns did not matter, I could meditate; listen to spiritual chants or talks on my cassette player, or read. Lockdowns only gave me more time for meditation. For others, to be caged in a ten-foot by six-foot space over twenty-four hours can be nerve wracking. It is like any animal that is caged. The more emotionally troubled they are, the harder it is to be caged. I for one was glad and relieved that I had my meditation practice, for it kept me sane and in a state of peace.

Lockdown this time for the Latinos lasted for weeks. Each time they were released for showers, another fight would break out. A little over a month went by before the lockdown ended for them. During that time yard was light in attendance, the work jobs were lighter, and it was like a small vacation in some ways. It was quiet, eerie and just ominous.

That year in 1997 we had many different lockdowns. It was not just the Latinos, but for the most part it was. The African American's also were locked down several times. One time a short but bloody fight started over in the corner by One Building. Within just seconds a group of over thirty guys gathered in a circle and the fight was on. One guy was stabbed very badly and we never saw him again on the yard. Not sure if he lived or was simply transferred to another prison after his hospital stay. But we did hear he was in the hospital for months. This fight was a result of problems after a drug deal. I heard it had

more to do with what was being sold and to whom rather than an actual sale. It was all over territory.

Changes within the prison system took a hold of Folsom too. They had decided to try and push for more programmed prisons. They shipped guys out to more specific prisons to deal with drug rehabilitation or mental wards for those on heavy psychotropic drugs. Many within our fellowship were being moved and left Folsom. For many, they took with them what they had learned from our group, sadly for many we simply never heard from them again.

One of the guys we knew was not part of our fellowship, but he was a nice guy. He got caught up in the move due to his mental condition and the medications he was on. They told him he would be moving, and he was very vocal over not wishing to move. His family lived near by, and visited him every weekend. With the move, due to their economical status, they would not be able to visit often. That only caused him to become more depressed. Many of us spoke to the officers how this move would not serve this inmate in a positive manner, but the bureaucracy of prison management did not see the human side of their proposed changes. One Saturday morning while getting ready for yard, we all heard the alarm. At this time I was housed in Four Building, the old solid door cells on two tiers, which was the old death row where they held the hangings in the 1880's. The alarm was in our building and we did not know at first what was going on. Soon word trickled down from cell to cell, that our friend had hung himself during the night. The fear of moving to another prison away from his family got the best of him mentally. He just could not handle it. We all mourned the passing of our friend that day.

In some ways prison is just a warehouse for men and women. The programs are not really attending to the emotional or spiritual needs for them while they are incarcerated. It has become sadly in America a place of great torture and abuse within the system that only seems to house inmates. Society must look at this closely. Without proper change, the men and women come back to prison due to their cycle of dysfunction that was never addressed when they were in the first time. We are building more and more prisons; each state is

requesting more funds for housing, and not addressing the need for rehabilitation. Change is possible. I have witnessed it in my life and in the men that I knew within the Contemplative Fellowship.

I can say that those of us who did learn and practice what we learned in the Contemplative Fellowship, once we paroled, our success rate was higher than those who did not have such a program. This is another reason I keep working with meditation teaching for prisoners. The transformation I received while in prison is also possible for anyone behind bars. The next chapter I will speak on several programs I also became involved with in prison that along with Contemplative Fellowship really helped me get the training and instruction I needed to change my life.

There are many great programs and willing volunteers to come teach inside prison. We have to realize that change comes when one first begins by admitting his own hurt and pain deep within them self. Rising above that pain and hurt is made easier with a spiritual program that assists this healing process. For me it was realizing I did not have a set belief structure in place on what was moral and loving. Once I understood that, I could begin to heal. With any spiritual practice your empathy for others suffering also increases. Keeping up with your spiritual practices allows us to see our own actions becoming more loving and operating from our heart center. That alone helps to cut the rate of parolees coming back on a violation. Their way of thinking and acting changes and it is for the positive. The prisoners just need the opportunity to experience the instruction and practice of these spiritual disciplines.

Chapter Eleven

Michael K. also brought in some books; specifically one titled, “Good Goats: Healing our Image of God”, by Matthew, Dennis Linn, Catholic writers, and monks who help others emotionally heal. As well, Richard Rohr, Thich Nhat Hanh, Dharma Publishers, and Foundation for Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition were some of the organizations, publishers and authors that sent us library books and materials.

The books by the Linn family were truly life changing for many of the men. For me it helped give me a meditation to help heal many of the emotional, mental, and abusive memories I had as a child growing up. As a child, many of the abusive situations I endured directly related to how I viewed the world I lived in and how I responded to that world around me. I had many emotional angry memories, which as child resulted in many outbursts that were hurtful to others and myself. As a child I did not understand what was happening to me, and my little mind could not process such abuse. So my outbursts were, looking back now, over abusive moments that stayed in my mind unresolved till it exploded out. The abuse was mental and emotional by nature and rendered me defenseless. As a child who did not get immediate healing or intervention, I grew up expecting abusive relationships. This was all I knew. While receiving counseling in prison I also began to identify key character issues and anger episodes coupled with known medical issues that more than likely I was sexually abused as a child. Talking with my brother and sister, I know that sexual abuse was generational within our family. As well in my family, the way I comprehended our outward appearance was that no matter what, we did not get into family issues in public. We never talked about our abuse. This duality really messed me up in so many ways. As stated before many key character and moral developments were lacking in my self. This is directly related to how I was raised as a child to not tell or speak out loud of the abuse, whether it was mental, physical, or sexual. So I had this duality, in where I appeared one way to others on the outside, but inside I was crying, hurting and bleeding. After years of living like this, I was out of

control in so many areas of my life. My alcohol and drug use become a way to stop the inner turmoil. All this did was temporarily numb my mind but true healing never came. The more I hurt inside the more out of control my drug and alcohol abuse became.

So the books by the Linn family really helped me deal and overcome a lot of those issues while I was in prison. Some of the issues remain buried to this day, and inch-by-inch, I grow healthier each and every day. Healing in some cases is and can be a life long path. One must not give up on it though and not try to rush it either. For any healing, one must see the pain, the hurt, and acknowledge it. We can't minimize it nor maximize it, but in reality admit that part of us is wounded.

For many of us, who are abused in whatever manner as a child and grow to adulthood without ever receiving healing, we have an awkward view or relationship with God, or whomever we choose as our higher power. We see God as one who allowed this abuse, so our relationship with and our view of Him are shattered.

Specifically, in my quiet time alone, or late night on my bunk if I could not have alone time in my cell, I would practice a meditation I found in the Good Goat's book. In this meditation, we are to envision us sitting in a room, in heaven, full of chairs, light, and just empty except Jesus and myself. We are simply sitting there, talking or being silent. When we begin to notice a door to the right of us, we hear a knock, and we know that behind that door is a person we have issues with. We walk to the door with Jesus, and he helps us open the door up. We know that what ever pain this person has inflicted to us, Jesus is right next to us to protect us, guide us and help us work through this hurt. We walk over with that person and sit down, with Jesus sitting between us. We openly discuss the pain and hurt inflicted by that person and how it hurt us deeply. We may cry or even be a bit angry. But we tell that person in front of Jesus how we hurt. Jesus then reaches out to our heart and places his hand and says, "I heal you, of this pain, and no longer will it affect you in a bad way." He also asks us to forgive that person, as he has forgiven us. We look over at that person, and say we forgive them. We see them also get touched by

Jesus as well. They ask us again to forgive them, and we see ourselves say to them, “I forgive you.” Jesus then stands us up and hugs us as we hug each other. Jesus leads the person to the door and they walk out. Jesus again hugs us and tells us he is always available here to help us heal. We begin to awake from this meditation and come back to the present moment.

This meditation when practiced really can help you receive the healings from past hurts you may have experienced. It also shows us and affirms in us that our loving Creator does love us, and does not want pain and hurt to be part of our lives. Until we first truly heal ourselves from our past hurts, abuses, and unloving actions, we will have a hard time having peace and love in our life. As well, once we start our healing process, our meditation and other spiritual routines help us heal faster, and keep this divine love growing inside us. This all leads to a truly transformed life. I am living proof of this and so are many other men who practiced these spiritual practices inside Folsom. My intent with writing this book and sharing my past is to reach out to you and let you know there is a way out from the hell of being in prison. You are loved, and deserve to be loved, and treated in a loving fashion. There is hope to change your life, and the simplest of all spiritual practices such as meditation can truly change your life.

In some ways you have received one of the greatest opportunities to be in prison. You have unlimited time and no restrictions to spend your time in meditation, spiritual reading, and spiritual healing. There won’t be another time you have this vast amount of free time to work on yourself. Thus when you get out, you truly are free. Free from the old self and have a new self to start over again. You can do your time in a loving spiritual manner, or you can do nothing. But when you do nothing, you won’t leave prison a better person than when you went in. I remember what a lifer told me once at a 12 Step meeting, “our best thinking got us into prison in first place, so to become healed and better, we must change our thinking.” This was the best advice I think I heard from a lifer.

So there you have it, and I hope you choose to take time to heal yourself and become a changed person before you parole. You deserve a life full of wonderful opportunities and loving experiences.

I won't lie to you, some of the issues I had to face, and what I heard others also had to face, healing can take time. It is painful to reclaim those hurt memories but if love can embrace our wounds, the positive healing change is worth it. Some issues are hard to call to mind, so be loving with yourself and open yourself to the right time for those to come forward in your mind. Pushing is not wise nor is it loving. We must learn to let things flow naturally out and into us, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. If we push things, we are allowing our rashness to override the perfect timing. The universe, God, the Holy Spirit, what ever you want to call it, has the perfect time for us to deal with all things. All of our practices and spiritual disciplines are to be seasoned with patience, peacefulness, and love. In time all things will come to pass. In the mean time, learn to love yourself and treat yourself, mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally with perfect love and peace. When you do this, it really brings calmness to your life and presence.

Healing of our past is so vital to true transformation. As stated in the Four Noble Truths, healing is essential. Suffering causes us to think in a certain unproductive manner. By healing those past hurts, they no longer have any hold or control of our mind. We are not locked into the past. With meditation we learn to live in the present moment. Accept the present moment as it is ever unfolding before our eyes and breath.

The past is hazy as a dream. The present is like lightening. The future is like clouds rising up suddenly. Remember that.

Chapter Twelve

Towards the end of my term in 1997 I had several opportunities to join in several workshops through the pre-parole classes. One of them was Siddha Yoga, which also practices meditation and hatha yoga as their main practice. Also I joined in a three-day workshop facilitated by the Quakers with “Alternative to Violence” (AVP) workshops. AVP was only once, but Siddha Yoga had monthly workshops that were quite inspirational. One of the programs with Siddha Yoga is a free monthly study course that really helps one awake to their true spiritual nature. This really helped me on so many different levels.

Siddha Yoga correspondence course is a set of writings that are mailed to you once a month. In the lessons are many opportunities to be aware of how silently and magically spirit exists. It helps instill in us the practice of living in the present moment. It helps too in that the lessons open one’s heart to the teachings of truth that are ancient. It also respects whatever faith or religion you have and even instructs you not to give that up. It really helps strengthen your own personal spiritual beliefs. The course is free to prisoners and I would highly recommend you subscribe to it.

At Folsom there were several who were receiving the course, and to my surprise some actual workshop leaders from the Oakland, CA Ashram were coming to Folsom to participate. It was only open for those in pre-parole, but since I was part of the Contemplative Fellowship and subscribed to the Siddha Yoga course, I was ducated to attend. For those not familiar with ducats, they are slips of paper given to inmates to attend different things, even your medical appointments. Without them, you are denied access. It is like the hall passes in junior high school.

Three guys from Oakland, including Murli, the CA coordinator for Siddha Yoga prison project was there. They all were so full of love and accepting of the men in the class. We had about fifteen to twenty

men in for a full day, 9am to 3:30pm class. We began our chant with Nag Champa incense burning. What a treat to have such divine smells permeate our classroom. We began to chant Om Nama Shivaya over and over to a CD with Gurumayi, the lineage person of Siddha Yoga. After the chant, we watched a video message from Gurumayi. In the talk she wove the stories from Christian, Hindu, and Buddhism to show how divine love is available to all of us. In the message were beautiful illustrations that made your heart sing for joy. It was divine; it was something I had never felt before. After the video message, we did a twenty-minute sit. After that it was our lunchtime, and each of the instructors made themselves available so we could talk with them. They gave each inmate equal time, and each talk was so filled with life and love. It was almost as if we were co-equals and not free person to inmate status in talking. It was so liberating.

After lunch we watched another video with John Friend detailing the practice of Hatha Yoga. The video showed different movements and positions that would help us sit for longer periods of time for meditation. All the inmates had brought their state issued blankets to sit on and were using them to do the movements. After the video we sat again for twenty minutes. Sometimes after the yoga exercises we would watch another message/teaching from Gurumayi or a chanting video where we would sit as we would in meditation.

These workshops were every month right up until I paroled in October 1997. They were useful in that it gave me another teaching method on meditation. It also helped strengthen my practice already in place. The energy and amount of love this practice created in me only proved that these techniques, the ancient form of chanting and meditation is all part of any transformation. I looked back at where I was when I first arrived, and knew that once I was released I had a better chance for success. I had changed, my heart had changed, my thinking had changed, and I was truly a changed person, inside and out.

Another program I was allowed to attend was the Alternative to Violence (AVP) workshop facilitated by the Quakers. ATV helps

empower people to lead nonviolent lives through affirmation, respect for all, community building, cooperation, and trust.

Founded in and developed from the real life experiences of prisoners and others, and building on a spiritual base, AVP encourages every person's innate power to positively transform themselves and the world.

AVP/USA is an association of community-based groups and prison based groups offering experiential workshops in personal growth and creative conflict management. The national organization provides support for the work of these local groups. The AVP program began in 1975 when a group of inmates at Green Haven Prison (NY) was working with youth coming into conflict with the law (yes--gangs existed even then). They collaborated with the Quaker Project on Community Conflict, devising a prison workshop. The success of this workshop quickly generated requests for more, and AVP was born. The program quickly spread to many other prisons.

Our workshop happened to coincide with a riot inside Folsom with two African American groups. Several of our participants were at the workshop when the riot went down. Due to their race, they had to leave the program that again was a three-day workshop. What really amazed me was how pro-active our facilitators were with the officers. They spoke up and said, clearly now more so than ever, is a great time for these guys to learn from the workshop and take the lessons they will have learned back to their friends. Long story short, those two African American men were allowed to stay and finished the three-day workshop. That alone was miraculous to see how the administration bended the rules for a positive program.

Within the three days were skits, crafts, dialoging, and real life scenarios where we would comment, act out, or draw how we could relate to the situation without violence. We listened to stories of previous workshop attendee's essays, and we discussed how we could all respond in other ways to situations rather than with violence. The combination of all inmates participation and being saturated with this philosophy for three days helped to sink in the knowledge we were learning.

For so much of my life, and for those attending this workshop, violence was a central theme of our life. We responded to situations

with angry knee-jerk response instead of thinking of another solution. We also learned about setting boundaries.

For the most part when people treat us with respect to our boundaries, there is no anger or outbursts. It is when those boundaries are crossed we feel threatened. In the class we learn to set healthy boundaries, and we would role-play how we would respond when others cross those boundaries. It gives us a chance to learn new coping skills so we don't resort to violence in our actions or speech.

We learn that we do have a choice on how we react and respond to others. This course taught how to make sure our actions do not lead to more violence. We learned to stay in control of our own actions. As a country boy it reminded me of an old country saying, "Does the tail wag the dog, or does the dog wag the tail?"

Giving violent responses to violence only keeps the negative violent energy active. To respond in a non-violent manner but with assertion neutralizes this energy.

We have a choice to be violent or not. The more skills we learn to act in a non-violent manner, the safer our surroundings will become. Both inside and outside of prison. AVP is a great tool in helping prisoners learn non-violent skills.

Chapter Thirteen

Towards the end of my term, I had a new cellmate, Skinny Puppy, who also joined us in the Contemplative Fellowship and the Siddha Yoga workshops. We were housed then in Number Five unit, one of the oldest parts of Folsom Prison. The cells were like dungeon cells with pure rock granite walls, and a solid door with just a few holes drilled into a heavy metal door. Skinny Puppy and I use to spend our time in our cells talking about meditation or other spiritual practices. We even had regular sits inside our cells. This helped me to have cellmates that respected my inner work and chose to also use their time working on inner self-issues. One time during our Siddha Yoga workshops, we said, “Wouldn’t be nice to have our own incense during our sits in our own cell?” Without thinking of the consequences, when we were leaving I grabbed a whole handful of incense sticks and pushed them inside my blanket. I did not get stopped nor searched, and we walked right around the chow hall from the pre-parole classrooms, into Building Five to our cells. That night after final count, we sat to mediate and lit our Nag Champa. Some of the guys on the cellblock begun to ask, “Whose burning Champa?” We quickly responded, “Hey keep it down, do you want to smell it or cost us to lose it?” Everyone seemed to welcome the sweet fragrant smell of incense. Well it did not take long for that little white trail of incense smoke to make it ways down the block and round the corner to the Sergeants desk. Well before you knew it, we had a guard sticking his nose in our cell sniffing around. To our amazement, he seemed to know, since we both were on the floor on our blankets in full lotus position, that all we were doing was meditating. The incense only helped set the mood. The guards never questioned us about it, no cell searches were done, and we seemed to be allowed to burn it at night after final lock down. However, the next three Siddha Yoga workshops no incense was brought in. Skinny Puppy and I joked around that it was our fault, we never knew, but we sure were not going to ask either. For those thirty days, at night in our cell, when we sat in silence, the smell took us far away mentally from being confined to a cell inside Folsom Prison.

The constant studies, reading, journaling and discussing things with Skinny Puppy, Paul, Diago or Lurch helped solidify my understanding of what I was learning. The continual programs of Siddha Yoga, Contemplative Fellowship, helped prepare me in so many ways for my parole. It seemed we really had a small community of like-minded inmates, and it almost was surreal enough to feel like a monastery and we were monks. However by the end of my term, Folsom was changing just as I had changed. It is those momentary situations inside prison that brings the reality home quickly that this is not the free world.

After Skinny Puppy paroled, Paul O. moved in, who was going to be released a month before me, and he was a fellow Contemplative Fellowship member. Paul and I both worked down in the lower yard. He was in Welding class, and I was a clerk in the Building Maintenance program.

Paul also had a friend named Ken who worked with me as a co-clerk for Bob. Bob was a homebuilder/contractor hired to teach construction skills to inmates in the vocational program. Bob was funny and was a hoot to work for. He was about 6'2" and weighed about 220 pounds. He was tall stout man, but he had no clue as to how to teach. Ken and I would read the text books, prepare lesson plans, and tests. Bob knew how to do all the important building skills; he just did not know how to teach inmates. So his clerks did most of it for him, which he appreciated. That is the way in prison often, funny in some ways.

Ken also was a vital member of our Contemplative Fellowship. He was a great advocate on the yard, and many others had major respect for him. One time, I knew that Kenny was facing some hard issues before he was paroling. For over eight years he had looked forward to getting out. Now some snag was in the way. He might face another term of undetermined years. One morning, when Ken was obviously upset due to his situation, I tried to help him. I mentioned learning from our last fellowship that we can spend so much time in our head dealing with issues that simply letting it go is less stressful. WHACK, was the next sound I heard and felt. I noticed my jaw and head were traveling at a fast rate in the opposite way my body was positioned. He did this inside our clerk's office when about five other lifers were present. Practicing what I had been taught in AVP and my meditation, I picked myself up from the floor, and said, "Ken, I know

why you hit me, and it is not because of what I said. You are mad and just venting. I love you my brother, and I wish you nothing but peace.” With that he stormed out of the office. All five lifers in the room with me just then, all had their jaws opened and were just dumbfounded. One thing in prison you learn quickly is if you are hit, you hit back. You don’t back down from anyone, guards included. If you do you are labeled a punk or coward. I looked at the lifers and said, “I know how I responded was not the convicts code, but any other way would have been unloving, and proven that all I have been studying was not valid. Say what you want, but I handled this in a way I know in my heart was the right way.”

Several of the lifers were just motionless and still had a shocked look on their faces. One of the guys spoke up and said, “You know Mark, you have better control of your self than what I think I do right now in my life.” The other lifers nodded in agreement. “This is a lesson that none of us here will likely forget.” Again they nodded in agreement. All the lifers there hugged me and said what I did was right, and it took a man to do that. They all asked more about the meditation program. For the rest of the week, many of lifers on the yard stopped me and shook my hand. It seemed many respected how I handled the situation. Especially that I held to my convictions and change in spirit, rather than to become trapped by following a code that is based in fear and violence.

Recently when I told another prison minister about this, Don Childers, he reflected that, “You know Mark, you probably saved many men’s life that day. Your action in front of those lifers taught them there is another way to respond to violence. And who knows, maybe that stopped them or kept them from hitting another man.” And that probably is true; I had never looked at this situation as a lesson that might have saved a future mans life.

Ken later came back that morning after cooling off. He thanked me for my words and encouragement. He apologized for hitting me. He was even amazed that I did not respond in violence. We hugged and with tears in his eyes, he said, “I really want the peace that you have inside you. I know I can find it too within myself.” After that, well, I knew the work we had been doing inside Folsom with the fellowship was truly changing men’s lives. I was humbled to think that four lifers and me a short-termers could create a program that offered hope instead of fear for the men.

Chapter Fourteen

Each week the fellowship grew, many of the new comers did not even know me. I knew the fellowship would last for years to come after I had paroled. I was short to the house as they say, with just a few weeks before I would be paroling. I had made some very deep spiritual connections with some of the lifers, and other short termers. I also knew for the most part, I would never see these guys again. Many of the guys who I spent quality time with would more than likely die within the walls of Folsom. This saddened me. Many of the prisoners I got to know did not have family or relatives and had no one to share with. Our fellowship was so full of love that this provided an emotional need in these men's life. I knew I would be leaving, and I did not want these men to feel that no one again would think of them in a positive light. I considered many of these men who had spent most of their adult life behind bars to be my personal friends.

My last Friday night Fellowship meeting was an emotional night for me. It was a special occasion when someone was paroling. We sat in a circle, all the guys got to say their good byes and many mentioned how my encouragement helped them learn and grow with their spiritual life. I lead the Dharma Teaching that night, and spoke on the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. I said if they just stuck with that and meditating every day for twenty minutes their lives would change like mine. That nothing really matters in prison except that you are growing with more spiritual awareness. With that, we all sat in silence, with no lights on and just a candle in the room.

This is special to note, because in prison so much is said about not being associated with anyone outside your race or car. (A car is like a group of persons from the same county or area.) Now this night, inside Folsom State Prison, at Greystone Chapel, twilight shining in the windows, the room was illuminated with a single glowing candle in the middle of the circle. Around the circle sat African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Whites. We had atheists, Celtic, American Indian, Protestant, Catholic, Baptist, Jews, and one Kabbalist all in a circle with their eyes closed in silence. If an officer walked in I knew they would just flip out. But for this last memory, it was transcending. For it truly showed how the ancient mystical workings of mediation

practice encompasses all walks of life, every culture, every race. It is open to all. It discriminates against no one who is seeking truth. It is open for all to find. And for many of us, it took us to get inside a prison to finally gain the freedom we had always searched for. This was my last night to be part of this mystic circle at Folsom Prison.

I was paroled a few days later, and moved back to Oklahoma. That was October 1, 1997. And to this day I have not been back to prison other than to visit or speak to groups of men about meditation. I have kept my practices alive and have studied more on various paths and ancient spiritual writings.

I am not the man today without acknowledging that the changes I came to embrace inside prison truly changed my life. I am no different from any other person. Awakening to the divine within your self is available for all. All one has to do is to be willing to learn and start the path to spiritual awakening likened to the way I have spoken of here. You are loved, and more important your divine Creator is standing ready to take your hand and show you this Divine Love is available for you. Many before me and many after me will continue to awake to the divineness inside them while in prison.

Chapter Fifteen

Upon paroling several unique things happened which should be shared. In some ways it is reaffirming the paths I took to heart in prison helped create the reality I am living on the outside.

I remember reading once, from the Siddha Yoga course, Baba Muktananda said this, “You are where you are today, this very moment, because of decisions you made in the past. Your future is now determined with the actions you choose today.” This is a very powerful truth which helps one keep their mind focused on right actions and right speech.

Once I got out, a few years passed and I found myself writing to about seventy prisoners. Many of them at Folsom who were with me during the early months of the Contemplative Fellowship. I also began to see that for many, I was saying the same things, in seventy letters at a time. So I decided to create a newsletter. I called it, “Dharma Seeds”. It was filled with writings from Fr. Thomas Keating, and others who gave me permission to re-print their spiritual writings. I wrote one article for each issue, but the primary writers were the masters behind contemplative lifestyles.

In time, I was able to get a list of prisoners across the USA, and began to send them the quarterly newsletter. Before I knew it, I had over two thousand subscribers. This grew beyond my expectations. So my sister and a dear friend of mine, Janice, created a non-profit, Dharma Seeds Foundation. We made sure to incorporate with the wording that all one hundred percent of the funds donated went to pay for the costs of publishing the paper and the mailing costs. Volunteers do all the other tasks. Dharma Seeds has no paid staff, it is lovingly provided for with volunteers. We still produce Dharma Seeds, and any prisoner can get a free subscription.

Also another unique thing that was rather miraculous happened during the tornado season in Oklahoma. A group of Siddha Yoga members in Oklahoma City went to Norman to help prepare for a nationwide mailing for Siddha Yoga. The mailing was for a retreat in June at the ashram in South Fallsburg, NY. While there, there was a tornado that touched down in the very vicinity as my apartment

complex I was living in at that time. Several of us stayed over in Norman, and drove back that Sunday morning. When I got to my street, it looked as if it was a military destruction scene. Trees, debris, parts of the buildings were in the street. You simply could not even drive down the street. Luckily for me my part of the apartment complex had escaped any tornado damage.

I went to work, for then I was working Sunday through Tuesday from 2pm till 2am with a publishing company as a graphic artist. While at work, I listened to country music and the station I was listening mentioned they would try and give away nine-hundred dollars on Monday morning. I looked at the picture I had on my desk of Gurumayi, and said, "Okay, I want to meet you in person, so help me to win that nine-hundred dollars." With nothing more to think about, I went back to work and continued creating advertising display ads until 2am.

When you work such weird and awkward hours your whole routine changes. I stayed up till 4am unwinding from my day at work and blessing from being spared tornado damages. I did set my alarm for seven am so I could see if I had won the money. When the alarm went off, I was so tired from only three hours of sleep; I simply hit the snooze button. Five minutes later, I awoke, and said, "Crap, I missed the number." I wrestled in my mind whether or not to call the radio station or turn over and get back to sleep. I chose to turn over and go back to sleep. But something was gnawing at me inside my stomach, so I rolled over and called the radio station. To my surprise, I did win, and I just waited till the last thirty seconds to call in to qualify. I was so excited. I used the money to go to the June retreat at the Ashram.

When I went to the ashram for a four-day retreat, with a few days of rest, I was so ecstatic to be there. All I had seen of Siddha Yoga was from the videos I saw in prison. Now I was actually there, in flesh and blood. There was no way I could have afforded this trip except by winning the money.

For days we sat in same hall as seen in many of the videos we watched in prison. I was within inches from Gurumayi, and to my surprise sitting next to me was John Friend, who had taught us via video how to do Hatha Yoga. I was running on pure bliss by this time. The last night while at the final chanting session, Gurumayi passed me, and I had thought I was suppose to have met her while there.

Before I could think, out of my gut, rose these words, “Gurumayi!” I was shocked, why did I do this, I knew better, this was rude, I felt so alone. All those thoughts whisked through my mind at a hundred miles an hour. Without acting as if anything out of the ordinary, Gurumayi turned and walked back towards me. I told her I had been in prison, and that Murli and others had come to us to teach us to meditate and chant. I gave her my mantra beads I had made in prison and she reached out to take them from me. But what she did was wrap her hands around me, and blessed me as she took the beads. I felt a spark of electricity enter my body, and it was as if time stood still for a very long time. When I came back to the present moment, Gurumayi had walked away and out the building. Those around me came to tell me what an extraordinary experience this was. For over twenty years, many had been coming to the Ashram, and no one had seen a spiritual master, a living Guru, turn and walk back on the path she/he had walked. And it is not protocol to yell out the Guru’s name. I told them; it came from my gut, not a premeditated decision. They knew that, for how it all unfolded was a miracle for them. Many of them thanked me for allowing this miracle to happen in front of them.

For me, it meant so much, to connect on the outside with someone and to an organization that reached out to me while inside prison. They all treated me as a fellow human and not as an ex-felon. This was truly a miracle retreat and many of the events to this day, some almost ten years later, are as vivid now in my mind as when it happened.

Many in prison told me that if you had been to prison opportunities would cease to exist for anyone once they paroled. This was not my experience. Time and time again, God has reached out to me, and showed me that I truly am a changed person. That I am truly loved, and all the abundance He offers is mine. I am free of my past. All I have now are moment-to-moment experiences of divine love each and every minute.

All I have witnessed and seen in my life since my parole is a confirmation that God is alive. That his Spirit is alive within me and that I have so much love to offer to all. Not every day is a great day, I still have bumps in the road, but how I relate to those moments are determined by how I choose to allow my meditation practices to come alive in that moment. It truly is transforming.

It is true that there are some in this world that will hold you to your past as they judge you. For me, I don't care. I know, again, I KNOW, who I am today. I don't have to prove it to anyone, my actions and my life today is my testimony to my change. Many choose to see me as I am today, and don't care about my past. Those are my friends and those are the persons I choose to be around. The ones who want to stay focused on my past just tells me that those persons are not my friends. I move on.

It is sad too that many of the churches and their members don't reach out to prisoners. Again I tell you don't let the actions of others control your state of mind. I am not here to change those who are closed-minded. I am here to offer hope to others who are seeking change. I have left many churches while I have been out for their attitudes towards ex-felons. That element may still exist when you get out. Don't let it trouble you. For there are many other true churches that practice the love God offers all! You must remember what Jesus said, in Matthew 25:32-45. He speaks of persons visiting him or not visiting him while in prison. And He replies in verse 45, "Then he shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to me." So don't let the lack of true love from the churches that don't offer it bother you. There are plenty of other churches that are welcoming of prisoners.

Please feel free to drop me a line. Let me know how this book has helped you. You are encouraged to subscribe to the free newsletter we produce called "Dharma Seeds." We publish it every quarter and it is full of meditation instructions and useful life changing articles.

These same opportunities, the ones given to me while I was in prison, are yours for the asking. All you must do is surrender your lower self, and allow the Higher Self to grow inside you. Bless you as you start your path and know you are loved! You are truly a wonderful creation of God and you deserve to be free! Peace is with you!

Biography

Mark D. Maxey

Mark strives for uniqueness in each line he pens. Through his writing, he deals with sensitive issues with directness and understanding. From light hearted to serious, his writing leads readers on a journey through an artist's mind. Along with his artistry, he is a brilliant organizer and dedicated friend. His words will take you into a strong heart and a deliberate mind. *-stated by John W. Reagor, Jr.*

Mark is an artist utilizing his talents through poetry, graphic arts, and photography. He has been published numerous times and has received various awards for his art. He spends his time in Oklahoma City working with others to improve and grow the artists community within Oklahoma. He serves on several art boards and volunteers his time teaching meditation and producing artists' workshops.

Mark also is in Holy Orders with the Eastern Orthodox Church, and helped start St. Raphael, the Archangel, Holy Catholic Church and Monastery, in Oklahoma City. He is also in a novitiate program with the White Robed Monks of St. Benedict. This order has direct ties to St. Benedict as well as with the Rinzai Zen traditions of Mahayana Buddhism.

Mark has helped form a non-profit organization in Oklahoma, Dharma Seeds Foundation. Dharma Seeds Foundation produces and publishes a newspaper regarding Chan Buddhist Meditation and Centering Prayer for persons incarcerated or in jails. The newspaper consists of educational and spiritual growth articles to aide in the positive change for inmates to facilitate their positive re-entry into society. The name of the newspaper is called "Dharma Seeds." All funds, whether income or principal, and whether acquired by gift or contribution or otherwise, is devoted to said purposes. All contributions (100%) go towards the publishing and mailing of the newsletter to those in jails and prisons. There is no paid staff just loving volunteers that offer their loving service to help those behind bars.

www.dharmaseeds.st-raphael-monastery.org

Resources for Prisoners

Free Books for Prisoners

Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery 16201 Tomki Rd., Redwood Valley, CA 95470

Americana Buddhist Temple 10515 North Latson Road, Howell, MI 48855

American Buddhist Association 10515 North Latson Road, Howell, MI 48843

Association for Research & Enlightenment 67th Street and Atlantic Ave., POB 595, Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Barre Center for Buddhist Studies 149 Lockwood Road, Barre, MA 01005

Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project POB 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703

Chuang Yen Monastery, Program Director for English Program 2020 Route 301, Carmel, NY 10512

Dallas Buddhist Association 515 Apollo Road, Richardson, TX 75081

Dharma Publishing 2910 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702

Freeing the Mindfulness, C/O Saraha Buddhist Center POB 12037, San Francisco, CA 94112

Healing Tao Prison Program POB 471, Revere, MA 02151

Human Kindness Foundation POB 61619, Durham, NC 27715

Larson Publications Dept. K, 4936 Route 414, Burdett, NY 14818

Liberation Prison Project POB 31527, San Francisco, CA 94131

Lionheart Foundation POB 194 Back Bay, Boston, MA 02117

Naljor Prison Dharma Service POB 1177, Mount Shasta, CA 96067

Prison Dharma Network POB 4623, Boulder, CO 80302

Ram Dass Tape Library Foundation 524 San Anselmo Ave., #203, San Anselmo, CA 94960

Snow Lion Publications POB 6483, Ithaca, NY 14851

Sutra Translation Committee 2611 Davidson Avenue, Bronx, NY 10468

Siddha Yoga Prison Project POB 99140, Emeryville, CA 94662

Theosophical Book Gift Institute POB 270, Wheaton, IL 60189

Victoru Banner Publishing POB 53461, Washington, DC 20009 ; book offered is "With You on The Path."

Wisdom Publications 199 Elm Street, Somerville, MA 02144

Woodland Publications 2000 Arapaho Street, Woodland Park, CO 80863

Free or Low Cost Buddhist Publications & Newsletters

Prison Dharma POB 4623, Boulder, CO 80306

Dharma Foundation POB 9999, Berkeley, CA 94709

Dharma Friends POB 7708, Little Rock, AR 72217-7708

Dharma Seeds POB 61175 ,Oklahoma City, OK 73146-1175

Gassho, Atlanta Soto Zen Center 1404 McClendon Ave., Atlanta, GA 30307

Gateway Journal Box 700, Ramsey, NJ 07446-0700

Gay Buddhist Fellowship 2215 R. Market Street, PMB 456, San Francisco, CA 94114

Healing Tao Prison Program POB 471, Revere, MA 02151

Insight Meditation Society 1230 Pleasant Street, Barre, MA 01005

Purple Lotus Seed 636 San Mateo Ave., San Bruno, CA 94066 (specify English or Chinese)

Shenpen Osel 4322 Burke Ave A., Seattle, WA 98103

Turning Wheel POB 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704-0650

Newsletters that focus on prisoners rights and criminal justice issues

The Beat Within 275 Ninth St., San Francisco, CA 94103

California Prison Focus 2940 16th Street #307, San Francisco, CA 94103

Coalition for Prisoners Rights POB 1911, Santa Fe, NM 87504

Families Against Mandatory Minimums 1612 K Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20006

National Lawyers Guild Prison Law Project 143 Madison Ave. 4FI, New York, NY 10016

North Coast Xpress POB 1226, Occidental, CA 95465

The Prison and Jail Project POB 6749, Americus, GA 31709

Prison Legal News 2400 NW 80th Street, #148, Seattle, WA 98117

Southland Prison Newsletter PMB-339, 955 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139

Free Buddhist Sutras

Dharma Seeds POB 61175 ,Oklahoma City, OK 73146-1175

Spiritual Resources/Christian

Bede Griffiths Trust c/o Osage Forest of Peace, 141 Monastery Road, Sand Springs, OK 74063

Christian Bible College and Seminary, 10106 East Truman Road, Independence MO 64052-2158

Emmaus Correspondence School, 2570 Asbury Road, Dubuque IA 52001

Lamp and Light Publishers, Inc., 26 Road 5577, Farmington NM 87401

Loved Ones of Prisoners (LOOPS), PO Box 14953, Odessa TX 79768

The Missing Link, PO Box 40031, Cleveland OH 44140-0031

Prisoners for Christ Outreach Ministries, PO Box 1530 Woodinville WA 98072-1530

Prison Mission Association / Bible Correspondence Fellowship, PO Box 2300, Port Orchard WA 98366

Fellowship of St. Silas, PO Box 822169, Vicksburg, MS 39182-2169 (Eastern Orthodox)

United Brethren Jail and Prison Outreach Ministry, Kirk and Crissy Killingsworth, 1278 Glenneyre Box 219, Laguna Beach CA 92651

Spiritual Resources/Hindu & Yoga

The American Gita Society, 511 Lowell Place, Fremont CA 94536

Association of Happiness for all Mankind (AHAM), 4368 NC Hwy 134, Asheboro NC 27203

The Gangaji Foundation Prison Project, 505A San Marin Drive Suite 120, Novato CA 94945

ISKCON Prison Ministry, 1400 Cherry St, Denver CO 80220

NITHYANANDA VEDIC TEMPLE, 9720 Central Ave., Montclair, CA 91763

Osho Viha Meditation Center, PO Box 352, Mill Valley CA 94942

Sai Baba Bookstore, 305 West First St, Tustin CA 92780

Siddha Yoga Meditation Prison Project / SYDA Foundation, Prison Project, PO Box 99140, Emeryville CA 94662

Sivananda Yoga Prison Project, Prisoner Outreach, PO Box 195, Budd Road, Woodbourne NY 12788

Yoga on the Inside Foundation, 1256 Westwood Blvd, Los Angeles CA 90024

Further Resources for Psychological / Spiritual Transformation (Ageless Wisdom / Interfaith / Metaphysical / Native American / Psychology)

Anthroposophical Prison Outreach Project, 1923 Geddes Ave, Ann Arbor MI 48104-1797

The Art of Living / Prison SMART Program, PO Box 3642, Boulder CO 80307

Association for Research and Enlightenment, 215 67th St, Virginia Beach VA 23451

Contemplative Outreach, PO Box 737, Butler NJ 07405

The Conversations With God Foundation / Prison Outreach, MB#1150, 1257 Siskiyou Blvd, Ashland OR 97520

Friends of Peace Pilgrim, 7350 Dorado Canyon Road, Somerset CA 95684

The Heart Mountain Project, c/o Doug Booth, 1223 South St. Francis Drive Suite C, Santa Fe NM 87505

Larson Publications, Dept K, 4936 Route 414, Burdett NY 14818

Mettanokit, 187 Merriam Hill Road, Greenville NH 03048

Miracles Prisoner Ministry (A Course In Miracles), 501 East Adams St, Wisconsin Dells WI 53965

Native American Pride Committee, 3256 Knight Court, Bay City MI 48706

Rosicrucian Fellowship, 2222 Mission Ave, Oceanside CA 92054-2399

The Rosicrucian Fraternity, PO Box 220, Quakertown PA 18951

Science of Mind Foundation, 2600 West Magnolia Blvd, Burbank CA 91505

Surviving The System, Traci Lister, PO Box 1860, Ridgeland MS 39158

White Mountain Education Association, 543 Eastwood Drive, Prescott AZ 863030

Legal Support

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) / Prisoner's Assistance Directory, National Prison Project Publications, 915 15th St NW 7th Floor, Washington DC 20005

Centurion Ministries, Inc., 221 Witherspoon St, Princeton NJ 08542-3215

Davrie Communications 13215-C8 SE Mill Plain #144, Vancouver, WA 98684

EDPUBS, PO Box 1398, Jessup MD 20794-1398

Families Against Mandatory Minimums, 1612 K St N.W. Suite 700, Washington DC 20006

Grassroots Investigation Project (GRIP), Quixote Center, PO Box 5206, Hyattsville MD 20722

Innocence Project, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, 55 5th Ave 11th Floor, New York, NY 10003

Lewisburg Prison Project, PO Box 128, Lewisburg PA 17837

National Lawyers Guild, 132 Nassau St. Room #922, New York NY 10038

The National Death Row Assistance Network of CURE (NDRAN), Claudia Whitman, 6 Tolman Road, Peaks Island ME 04108

Prison Legal News, 2400 N.W. 80th St #148, Seattle WA 98117-4449

